POPPY OTT AND THE PRANCING PANCAKE

BY LEO EDWARDS

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POPPY OTT AND
THE PRANCING PANCAKE

THE OLD GEEZER WAS FEEDING RAW LIVER TO THE BIGGEST TURTLE THAT I EVER SET EYES ON.

Poppy Ott and the Prancing Pancake. *Frontispiece (Page 24)*

POPPY OTT

AND THE PRANCING PANCAKE

BY

LEO EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF
THE POPPY OTT BOOKS
THE JERRY TODD BOOKS
THE ANDY BLAKE BOOKS
THE TRIGGER BERG BOOKS

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TO

MY PAL

JOHN VAN WAGNER

OUR CHATTER-BOX

ALWAYS, I suppose, in preparing the copy for my books (this is Leo Edwards speaking), it will be necessary for me to explain, at the beginning of this department—"Our Chatter-Box"—what it is and why it's here. For new readers are constantly joining our friendly circle. And it is at these fine young chaps, now lined up on Jerry's and Poppy's side, that these opening informative paragraphs are directed.

Boys reading my books find in them an intended atmosphere of friendliness. The books are more than mere entertainment. They are the message of a grown-up boy to boys—the message of a man who dearly loves boys, who wants to fill their lives with clean, skylarking fun and watch them grow up into strong-bodied, capable, useful men.

You can't fool boys. If you're their friend, they know it. And if you just pretend friendship, they know that, too. So, it isn't surprising that my daily mail is jammed with letters from boys everywhere, which open-hearted communications are the answer to the friendly appeal built into my books.

And what bully good letters they are! They thrill me, so frank are they. They amaze me, too, for I find that countless boys (Jerry Todd fans, I call them) remember every little detail that I put into my books. If I state in one volume that Jerry has a pet toad, and fail to mention the toad in the next book of the series, dozens of boys hasten to inquire what became of the toad.

Of great interest to me, and of great help, too, I felt that the readers of my books in general would be interested in these letters. So, not long ago, I picked out the best of them, incorporating them in our first "Chatter-Box," which appeared in *Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem.* Since then similar "Chatter-Boxes" have appeared in the order given in *Jerry Todd and the Bob-Tailed Elephant, Andy Blake's Secret Service, Trigger Berg and the Treasure Tree* and *Trigger Berg and His 700 Mouse Traps.* Hence this is our sixth "Chatter-Box."

If you have written me a letter, be sure and read these preceding "Chatter-Boxes." For your letter may have been used. Then, too, if you want inside information on Jerry, Poppy, Scoop, Peg, Red and Leo himself—if you want to know if the story characters and places that I write about

are real—by all means turn to these earlier books. There's a treat in store for you.

This is your department, boys. For "Chatter-Box" means a lot of gab from everybody. So, if you want to be represented, write me an interesting letter. If it *is* interesting—if it contains something of undoubted interest to our readers in general—I'll try and use a part of the letter in a future "Chatter-Box." The published letters of other fans will give you an idea of what we like best. Letters of criticism are just as welcome as letters of praise. For the right kind of criticism points the way to bigger and better things.

Or, if you wish to dip into poetry, do your best—or your worst! Read the poems in this issue. These young poets each received, as a reward, an autographed copy of this particular book. Such will be your reward, too, if your submitted poem is published, only, of course, *you* will receive a copy of the book in which your masterpiece appears.

We can't use drawings, but will consider any brief practical contribution of interest to boys. Writers of accepted letters do not receive awards. The publication of such letters is sufficient reward in itself.

And now let us see what some of the boys have to say.

LETTERS

I KNOW how Jerry must have felt when his scow sank in the canal, as related in the *Whispering Cave* book," writes Philip Colwell of Yonkers, N. Y., "because in Pittsfield, Mass., where I used to live, we had an old leaky rowboat that sank with us."

And what a fine piece of journalistic work is this hand-lettered, nine-page newspaper, *The Exeter Meteor,* sent to me by Bob Rathbone of Exeter. Vt. Each page contains three columns of news, editorials and advertisements. Also Bob has produced two of his own original stories. It took time and patience to create this newspaper, for each word is printed neatly by hand and the whole contains many beautiful decorations in colors. Bob evidently has the "urge" of both a journalist and an artist. I predict that he will go far.

"Every time I have an ache or a pain," writes Buddy Savage of Fredericksburg, Va., "my father buys me an Ott or Todd book. I now have two Otts and five Todds."

From which we are to assume that Buddy has had only seven pains. This makes my twenty-first book. So, Buddy, why not have fourteen more pains and thus secure the complete file, including the new "Trigger Bergs?"

"During my summer vacation," writes Donald Pitman

of Wilkes-Barre, Pa., "I went to a place called 'Promised Land Lake.' One night I started out alone to get a mess of catfish. There is a channel for the boats, easily seen in the daytime but not at night. The lake was quite low and the stumps of trees and bushes made the place quite dangerous for anyone who did not know the channel. I fished around for two or three hours and then it began to get dark. I was reminded of Jerry in the *Pirate* book. The bullfrogs tuned up for their evening concert, and believe me there were plenty of frogs. I started for home in the dark. And now comes the funny part: I got lost. I bet I rowed around that blamed lake 'steen times before I gave it up. Every ten feet or so I'd get hung up on a sunken log. Finally I came upon another fishing party, who told me to stick around with them and later they'd show me the way home. I stuck. I fished, too, and in about three minutes I pulled in a big catfish. Got eight all together. Next morning I told the story that the fish were so plentiful that I had to sock them with an oar to keep them from climbing up my line and upsetting the boat."

And here's a letter from John Van Wagner of Shelby, Ohio, the boy pal of mine to whom this volume is dedicated. I worked with John's fine dad in advertising. That was several years ago. John then was a very small boy. Since then he has grown into a fine, manly (and mighty good-looking) boy of sixteen, now an Eagle Scout. For which attainments I am very proud of him and have a very deep affection for him. Twice during his "growing-up" process he has visited me at Lake Ripley, where I have a summer home, and the last time he was here we enjoyed a memorable trip up the Dells of the Wisconsin River. It is this trip that John has reference to in his letter. We were in a small boat, propelled by an outboard motor. The waves from a passing big boat filled our craft half full of water. Bob Billings and my boy Beanie were seated on the bottom. So you can imagine how wet they got. John and I, on seats, got only our feet wet. Landing on a sandy beach (regular Robinson Crusoe stuff), we built a fire. Bob and Beanie stripped to the skin—ducking behind trees when a passing boat came along, which was often. It took us an hour to dry out. Nor did we get back to the hotel, where the four of us were staying, without other hazardous adventures. So I was glad when we landed safely at the hotel dock. And now let us read John's letter.

"Dear Uncle Leo: I wish I were still in Wisconsin. I miss the fun we had there. And the most fun was where we had the boat swamped and had to build a fire and dry out

in the Dells. I suppose you are working on your new books. I loaned the books I brought home with me and also some of the others you gave me. Most of the boys, including myself, prefer your Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott books to your Andy Blake books. Your Todd and Ott books are different from most books, but your Blake books aren't. Therefore most boys prefer the former.

"I am working only part time now. I am doing a lot of swimming so as to pass the Red Cross Life-saving test, which will pass me for Boy Scout Life-saving merit badge. And then I will be an Eagle!

"Have the Cambridge Boy Scouts taken their trip yet? I hope they have a good time and I am sure they will, because we had a fine time when we went on that trip.

"Well, I hope you are all feeling good. None of our family are sick except my sister Alice, who has a bad cold. By the way, to-day is Alice's birthday. She is twelve and will now have to pay full-price admission at the shows. Since I came home I have spent two dollars and thirty-five cents going to shows.

"Here's hoping you can get something out of this for your 'Chatter-Box.' With best wishes, I am your loving pal, John."

"I was run down and had a terribly bored thinking apparatus," writes Bingham Soph (alias Hambone Soapsuds) of Tulsa, Okla. "A friend said: 'Use some of Dr. Leo Edwards' Jerry Todd LAUGH MEDICINE.' I have taken nine bookfuls. It is a wonderful cure."

"I carved a totem pole as near like the one in the frontispiece of the *Tittering Totem* book as I could," writes Scott Boylan of Portsmouth, Va. "I painted it, too."

"It was a thrill to meet the author of my favorite books and to ride with him in his fast motor boat on Lake Ripley," writes Bill Jones of Beloit, Wisc. "But to have an autographed copy of one of his books is a pleasure I cannot express. I will not be satisfied now till I have read the rest of the Jerry Todd books."

"After reading *Jerry Todd, Pirate,*" writes Rodney Courant of Oakland, Calif., "I organized a club of my own. We mounted a regular 'Big Bertha' in front of our clubhouse. Some boys living on another street thought they would like to have a little 'talk' with mud balls. Sweet sardines! Did we ever paste them? I think your 'Chatter-Box' idea is swell."

GIRLS

IT MIGHT surprise the big army of Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott fans to learn how many thousands of girls are reading my books. I

never have tried to make these books of special interest to girls. Yet the required manly conduct of my heroes seems to strike the fancy of girls of a type—I might say the tomboy type.

I get a big kick out of the letters that girls write to me. Recently one girl in the South told me that her nickname was "Jackie." And whoever dared to call her by her real name, she said, would get a "poke in the face."

However, I hasten to add, out of justice to girls in general, that very few of my feminine correspondents express themselves so forcibly. For all girls, even girls who read boys' books, aren't tomboys.

This book will be of particular interest to my girl readers. For one of the story's chief characters is a most fascinating girl. And how other true-hearted girls will thrill over Bobs' splendid triumph!

Quite probably I made a feature character of Bobs to please the many known girl readers of my books. Which prompts me to add that no girl who wants to become a Freckled Goldfish is ever denied membership. Girls, too, if they wish, may start Local Chapters. We show no partiality.

POEMS

"YOUR idea of poems for books is very good, I think," writes Robert Bash, 628 E. 8th St., Oklahoma City, Okla. "You will undoubtedly go down in history as the first author to think of theme songs for books. All talking movies now have theme songs, so why not books? And here's a poem of my own:

Seven League Stilts

Poppy Ott and Jerry Todd
Set out to make some money.
Poppy had a fine idea,
But Jerry thought it funny.

Poppy had a nifty scheme
To make stilts, strong and high,
To advertise the merchants' wares
And make the people buy.

The "Seven League Stilts" were painted red,
They really looked immense.
They made all other home-made stilts
Look like eleven cents.

A smart rich kid then butted in
And tried to kick them out,
But Jerry and Poppy locked him up
And let the young snob shout.

Though started on a smaller scale,
The business grew so large,
They had to start a factory
With Mr. Ott in charge.

Which, I think, is a dandy good poem. And it gives me great pleasure to award Bob

an autographed copy of this book.

And now let us see what happens to "The Galloping Snail" when Thomas Broderick of 63 Leamington Rd., Brighton, Boston, Mass., breaks into poetry.

The Galloping Snail

Lawyer Chew bit off more
than he could swallow
When he undertook to follow
Poppy and Jerry in the Galloping Snail,
With sweet young Eggbert
hot on the trail.

Chatter-box Ma Doane
Was afraid when alone,
But when facing Fatty Chew,
Oh, boy! What couldn't
she do?

Poor Goliath had to have another bed,
One for his feet and one for
his head.
Dr. Madden was the key
To the puzzling mystery.

Miss Ruth was not fair
In not relieving Ma of her
despair.
And maybe Jerry didn't go
When the gander bit his toe.

But Jerry was like slow-
motion
When a hornet took a notion
And landed square on Eggbert's pants.
Boy! You should have seen
him dance.

Very good, Tom. And I hope you'll treasure the book I'm sending to you.

Here's one from George Butler, 819 North State St., Jackson, Miss.

Us

My name is Jerry Todd,
I live in good old Tutter.
I like to eat ice cream and
cake
And jam and bread and
butter.

Scoop Ellery and I are chums,
Peg Shaw and also Red.
It makes me sad to say
good-by
To them and go to bed.

We always have a lot of fun
When we go out together.
We're seldom very far apart
In any kind of weather.

Mysteries are our meat.
Detectives gay are we.
The easiest thing for us to do
Is solve a mystery.

So you, too, George, are going to be awarded an autographed book. And may you become as famous as Longfellow himself.

Jack Reed of Liberty, Mo., contributes this one:

Jerry Todd and the Bob-Tailed Elephant

The show in Red's barn was
a big success,
But he paid for it at home
with a scolding (more or
less).

Red got huffy and when his
folks went away
He packed up his stuff and
skinned out that day.

He got on the turnpike near
Mrs. Bibbler's farm,
When he fell down a bank
and nearly broke his arm.
When he looked in the water
he felt very meek
For he had lost a thirty-buck
mattress in the creek.

A chum of Jerry's disappeared
one day.
It seemed as if into the air
he had vanished away.
They hunted for him, but all
in vain,
Then, about two months later,
he turned up again.

Nothing has been said of the
elephant,
For I want you to read the
book,
And see how much trouble,
The elephant took.

When you've read the book,
Please let me know
What you think of the ele-
phant
And the show.

Good work, Jack. And, of course, you get a book, too.

Here's a snappy one, contributed by Hubert J. Bernhard, 218-22 36 Ave., Bayside, L. I.

Aunt Pansy's parrot
Started to roam.
Red Meyers' job was to
Bring it home.

He brought it home—
A messy mess.
And did he catch Hail
Columbia?
I *guess yes!*

Thanks, Hubert. I'll see that you, too, get the promised award.

And this one comes from Gordon Mann, 62 N. Robinson St., Philadelphia, Pa.

Jerry Todd and His Trusty Gang

Oh, Jerry Todd lives in
Tutter.
One day Bid Stricker pushed
him in the gutter.
But who should come along
but trusty Peg Shaw,
And Bid went home with a
broken jaw.

One day the gang went to
explore
The wilds of Oak Island ga-
lore.
They thought they had some
secret caves to discover.
But to their dismay they
found Bid under cover.

Jerry Todd grabbed him by
the neck.
And Bid went home a ner-
vous wreck.

I suppose we should have had two more lines in that last verse, Gordon. But you get an award just the same.

And we'll close with this one, contributed by Ralph Mohat, 538 N. Prospect St., Marion, Ohio.

The Waltzing Hen

Jerry Todd, Scoop and Peg
  Slept in Jerry's yard.
The tent was big and had a
  floor,
  But, gee, the cots were
  hard!

They met a mysterious yellow
  man,
  Also a yellow cat.
What was the connection be-
  tween the two?
  Boy! You'll wonder about
  that.

Cap'n Tinkertop got a bath
  With paint so very red.
To fool a fat lady they pre-
  tended
  That he was sick in bed.

What about that peculiar hen
  That so beautifully did
  waltz?
Was it the Cap'n's transmi-
  gration?
  Or was that stuff all false?

ANDY BLAKE

THESE are stories for older boys, for Andy himself is a young man in his early twenties. Having picked out advertising and merchandising as his life's work, these books written around him contain that specific business atmosphere—something I know considerable about, for I, too, spent many productive and happy years in advertising work.

Four titles are now listed:

Andy Blake
Andy Blake's Comet Coaster
Andy Blake's Secret Service
Andy Blake and the Pot of Gold

Please remember, boys as you grow older, that Andy, with his big business ideas and the courage to put these ideas into effect, is a book pal worth having. His is a warm, loyal, lovable nature. Now that we have "Trigger Berg" at the foot of the class, as you might say, you can start in reading my books (or having them read to you) at the age of eight and keep on reading them until you are in college.

TRIGGER BERG

THOUSANDS of you boys, I dare say, have already seen and read my two "Trigger Berg" books, the first of a new series. Trigger is very dear to me. I enjoy writing about him. Fair and square all the way through—that's the kind of a little lad he is. It would seem, though, that there's nothing within a radius of fifty miles of his home that he doesn't get into. As a result of this unsuppressed energy he frequently finds himself in hot water, all of which helps imbue the books with clean boyish fun.

Yes, Trigger (the baby of the family!) is one of my

most beloved story characters. And I hope that you Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott fans will give him a place in your friendly hearts. You'll find him a pal worth having. And his buddies, Slats, Friday and Tail Light, are of the same stamp.

To better introduce Trigger to you I have, with my publisher's permission, incorporated a chapter from one of his skylarking books in the conclusion of this volume. For really, fellows—and I say this in utmost earnestness—I don't want you to miss the jolly good fun that these books provide. Written in diary form, each book, from start to finish, fairly sparkles with fun and natural boyish activities and accomplishments.

It would make me exceedingly happy if you would write a letter telling me what you think of Trigger. If you share my affection for him, tell me what inspires the corresponding warmth in your own heart. Or, if he bores you, tell me what's wrong with him, according to your ideas. For I want these books to stand out. I want them to be my best. So you can see why I value your opinion.

Two titles are listed:

Trigger Berg and the Treasure Tree

Trigger Berg and His 700 Mouse Traps

And coming soon is *Trigger Berg and The Sacred Pig.* Nor will the odd little pig featured in this promising story be the only one who "squeals" when you get the story into your hands. You'll very probably do considerable squealing yourself, along with your chuckling and giggling.

MORE LETTERS

MAYBE you don't know it," writes Harris Fant of Anderson, S. C., "but I am the seventeen-year-old author of the famous 'Stiletto Murder Case,' which has been successfully produced in Greenville, S. C., as a three-act play."

Congrats, Harris. To judge from the title your play must be nice and gooey—ketchup to the right of us, ketchup to the left of us, etc., etc.

And what do you know if Markle Sparks (alias Freckled Perch) of Oklahoma City, Okla., hasn't sent in a complete map of Tutter and surrounding country, showing the location of Oak Island, the lock, Mr. Arnoldsmith's house, the Stricker clubhouse, the Weir house, the Chinese laundry, the Elite beauty parlor, etc. In all, twenty-two points of interest to Jerry Todd fans are mentioned. A splendid piece of work.

"In one of our English tests," writes Jack Cunningham of Nutlay, N. J., "we were required to write about some book that we had read.

Practically every boy in the class wrote about a Jerry Todd or Poppy Ott book. I wrote about a battle between Bid Stricker's gang and Jerry's gang. Here's a poem that a friend of mine made up about Red:

Red mixed his beans with honey—
He did it all his life.
Not because he liked the taste,
But because they stuck on his knife.

"My mother," writes Marshall Clagett of Los Angeles, Calif., "enjoys your books and always looks forward to the evenings when she can read aloud. Also, I would suggest that you have Jerry's whole gang in the Poppy Ott books."

"I am striving to be an author," writes fourteen-year-old Charles Herman Pounders, Jr., of Florence, Ala., "and would like to have a lot of friendly advice from you. So please write me a big long letter."

Such letters frequently reach me. So earlier I was tempted to give these aspiring young authors some helpful advice. My comments and suggestions were published in our first "Chatter-Box."

And again and again boys ask me the question: "Is Jerry Todd a real boy?" In the same "Chatter-Box" in which I gave my comments on writing, as mentioned in the preceding paragraph, I told boys the truth about Jerry and his gang, who they are and all about them. So, if you want the "low-down" on Jerry, turn to *Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem* and read the complete "Chatter-Box."

"I read *Poppy Ott and the Stuttering Parrot* at school," writes William J. Weichlein of Maywood, Ill., "and the story went over big."

You're luckier than another boy pal of mine, Bill. He took the same book to school for the teacher to read aloud. And when she came to the part where the parrot says: "B-b-blood! B-b-blood! Gu-give me a bucket of b-b-blood!" she snapped the covers of the book together, calling it rubbish, threatening the boy if he ever brought another book like it to school she'd use a switch on him.

"I call you 'Dear Leo,'" writes Don Gallagher of Chicago, Ill., "because you are a good fellow and want your readers to be familiar with you."

You're right, Don. Boys who feel they should be "on their dignity" around me, either in person or in correspondence, sure are wasting a lot of energy. The other evening (in July), some boys who dropped in to spend a few hours with me took me down, stood me on my head (or, rather, on the back of my neck), and then pulled off my shoes and socks, hanging

the latter (in knots) on a light fixture.

"I believe," further writes Don, "that if Poppy, Jerry, Scoop, Peg, Red and Rory started a circus and had freckled goldfish, a rose-colored cat, a waltzing hen, a bob-tailed elephant, with Red to complete the menagerie, the circus would be a humdinger."

"When I was in camp," writes Harvey Travis of Endicott, N. Y., "the Boy Scouts all went over to Warren Center one day to help the little burg celebrate 'Old Home Day.' Boy, did we ever have fun marching up and down the one and only main street. I wish you could have been there, and Jerry, too. The village band was out; so was the fire department, consisting of four men and a two-wheeled hose cart from which dangled a lot of buckets. I thought of Tutter. And in a picture show we saw a fellow, a sort of goofy detective, who was a dead-ringer for Bill Hadley."

OUR SCHOOL CLUB

JUST as my Jerry Todd, Poppy Ott and Trigger Berg books are written primarily to fill the lives of boys with clean, natural fun, so also would I like to have my young readers share this book fun of theirs with others. Which can be done individually if you will prevail upon your teacher to read one of my Todd, Ott or Berg books aloud. That will be fun for the whole room.

If your teacher, through your personal efforts, reads one of my books to the school (or if you read the book) you automatically become a member of our "School Club," and should so notify me. Your name will be published in a future "Chatter-Box." Also, at the end of the year the names of all members will be put "into the hat." Twenty names will be drawn at random. And each of these twenty boys or girls (the first year we drew ten names and next year we will draw thirty) will receive an autographed copy of my latest book. The names of club members once receiving awards will not be included in later drawings. After the third year we may want to make some changes in the club, probably retiring the older members.

PICTURES

YOU'VE all heard the old saying about making hay while the sun shines. Well, to judge from appearances that is what is being done in this picture before me of Edward Derzius of Worchester, Mass. Ed is thirteen, a stocky lad; and not so hard on the eyes, either.

In sending me his photo, Wolfram Stenzel of Long Island City, N. Y., asks that

in return I send him a photo of Jerry, Peg, Scoop and Red. "Is Peg really such a fighter?" inquired Wolfram. "And is Scoop such a thinker as to make Jerry the ghost of the hermit in the *Oak Island* story? Also, has Red freckles? Is Al Moore, in the *Pirate* story, in the *Bob-Tailed Elephant* book? If not, what became of him?"

And my answer is—you bet Red has freckles. Oodles of 'em. And Peg (a character taken from life) is as liberally supplied with grit. Al is not in the *Elephant* book—as I understand it, he's away at boarding school. Yah, Scoop has brains, all right, and how!

And just to prove to me that Wisconsin, my home state, produces just as many real he-boys as our neighboring states, Irving Bremman of Waukesha accompanies his Goldfish application with a snapshot of himself. He says he's a great reader, and he looks it. I wish, Irv, you'd drive over and see me some time. You're only about forty miles away. And I sure love to have the boys drop in on me.

Evidently George Frantz of Coatesville, Pa., sells papers. For having sent me his picture, in boxing position (boy, I'd hate to have him sock me!), he asks me to write a book about Jerry boxing and selling papers.

And who's this round-faced, good-looking chap whose picture bobs up in front of me? Oh, yes—Nathaniel Friedman of Beachmont, Mass. And you say, Nat, that you haven't read a Poppy Ott book? Suffering cats! You sure are missing a lot of fun. For surely you know that Jerry Todd is in these books, too. Jerry, in fact, tells the story.

Nor must I overlook this picture of Margaret Truhar of Paterson, N. J. "This is me when I'm not in knickers," Margaret writes. And is she a Freckled Goldfish? Yes, indeed.

Some boys think it's a task to write by hand. But here's the picture of a good-looking, bathing-suited boy—Wilbur Bogart of Westfield, N. J.—who claims that he can write with his feet. "Also," confides Wilbur (he doesn't state whether his letter was written by his uppers or lowers), "I can pick up small objects with my toes, such as spools and thimbles. When writing in the sand I use a pointed stick."

And here's the picture of another girl—Lucy Marie Geraghty of San Francisco, Calif.—all togged up in pirate clothes, which costume, I am given to understand, was inspired by *Jerry Todd, Pirate*. There is a second picture of Lucy and her girl friend and still another of two swell-looking boys in uniform. "They are my two favorite cousins, Owen and Jim McCoy," writes Lucy, "and they

attend St. John's Military Academy."

And in final, here's a snapshot of Carlyle Dunaway of Norfolk, Va., His letter is very interesting; and he's a mighty bright-looking lad.

FRECKLED GOLDFISH

I'M NOT going to take up the space here to tell you in detail about our Freckled Goldfish Club. That growing club has been given extensive mention in all of my recent books. But I will tell you a lot about the club in my next book, *Jerry Todd, Editor-in-Grief*.

Which is all for this time. Remember, fellows, the more letters you write to me the happier it makes me.

Leo Edwards,
Cambridge,
Wisconsin.

LEO EDWARDS' BOOKS

Here is a list of Leo Edwards' published books:

THE JERRY TODD SERIES

JERRY TODD AND THE WHISPERING MUMMY
JERRY TODD AND THE ROSE-COLORED CAT
JERRY TODD AND THE OAK ISLAND TREASURE
JERRY TODD AND THE WALTZING HEN
JERRY TODD AND THE TALKING FROG
JERRY TODD AND THE PURRING EGG
JERRY TODD IN THE WHISPERING CAVE
JERRY TODD, PIRATE
JERRY TODD AND THE BOB-TAILED ELEPHANT
JERRY TODD, EDITOR-IN-GRIEF
JERRY TODD, CAVEMAN
JERRY TODD AND THE FLYING FLAPDOODLE
JERRY TODD AND THE BUFFALO BILL BATHTUB
JERRY TODD'S UP-THE-LADDER CLUB

THE POPPY OTT SERIES

POPPY OTT AND THE STUTTERING PARROT
POPPY OTT'S SEVEN-LEAGUE STILTS
POPPY OTT AND THE GALLOPING SNAIL
POPPY OTT'S PEDIGREED PICKLES
POPPY OTT AND THE FRECKLED GOLDFISH
POPPY OTT AND THE TITTERING TOTEM
POPPY OTT AND THE PRANCING PANCAKE
POPPY OTT HITS THE TRAIL
POPPY OTT & CO., INFERIOR DECORATORS

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POPPY OTT AND THE PRANCING PANCAKE

CHAPTER I

THE VANISHED CARD

If you think that Red Meyers isn't a big monkey (and what reader of my books doesn't remember *him,* freckle-faced, red-headed, gabby little runt that he is), you should have been in school the day we organized our band. For what do you know if he didn't get up with his mouth full of gumdrops and tell the organizer that his ma wanted him to study the accordion so that he could play solos when she entertained the Tutter Stitch and Chatter Club.

Good grief! I thought I'd bust. For he let on that he was in dead earnest. He wanted to study some of the compositions of the old masters, he said, such as "The Mocking Bird" and "Who Put the Overalls in Mrs. Murphy's Chowder?" The kids, of course, almost laughed their heads off. For Red is well liked.

Later, he bought a trombone. And then he

and Rory Ringer, his new pal, who also has a trombone, got up a set of signals. Red would roost on the peak of his pa's barn and toot, a long agonizing toot representing "a," a long and a short "b," and so on. And Rory, a block away, would correspondingly toot through an attic window. The neighbors got kind of huffy about it, especially when the hard-working tooters took to imitating various kinds of farm animals. Gee! First one would bellow like a bull with red-hot tweezers on its tail. Then the other would squeal like a stuck pig. They could imitate dogs, too, and fighting roosters. At times it got real exciting. And did I ever laugh the day they were putting on a special rehearsal in the gooseberry bushes in Red's back yard? Old Mrs. Higgins, who now lives next door to Red, threw a pan of dishwater on them, thinking, I guess, that they were a couple of squabbling tomcats. Red has had it in for the old lady ever since, claiming darkly that she put some kind of bug powder into the dirty dishwater that made his back break out terrible.

Mr. Mear, our band director, lives in Ashton, the county seat, where he has taught music in the public schools for more than ten years. He also has charge of other school bands throughout the county. Late getting started in this new work, we were eager to catch up with the neighboring

bands so that we could take part in the annual spring tournament. And as though to encourage us the district organization, which included several counties, voted to hold the coming two-day tournament in Tutter.

When told that the visiting bands would probably number more than two thousand players, all boys and girls, the Tutter people generously offered to throw open their homes, thus providing the visitors with free lodging. And the various churches agreed to serve inexpensive meals.

Our band was entered in class "C." But we knew we'd never get a prize if Red Meyers played with us. For his only purpose in buying a trombone, we learned, was to show off and make a noise. Unlike Rory and the rest of us he didn't even try to learn his notes. Boy, his playing was *awful.* Talk about sour notes! So we very tactfully got together (having talked the matter over on the sly) and elected him drum major.

Poppy Ott had charge of the meeting.

"If we're going to march," says he, in good leadership, "we've got to have a drum major. For every marching band requires a drum major. . . . Have you any suggestions, Jerry Todd?" he called on me.

I then inquired innocently, mainly for Red's benefit, what a drum major was supposed to do.

"He leads the band," says Poppy.

I let my face light up.

"Oh! . . ." says I. "You mean the guy who wears the classy uniform and beats time?"

Classy uniform! Red's ears were as big as pieplant leaves.

"Exactly," says Poppy. Then he gravely looked around the room, letting his eyes rest on freckle face, who, of course, was tickled pink (like his hair!) when we finally elected him to the important job. For he dearly loves to show off.

Our new uniforms came the following Wednesday. There was a baton, too, about three feet long, with a big silver-plated knob. A sort of cane. Instructed how to beat time with it, Red further conceived the clever idea of doing juggling tricks with it.

Naturally, *he* would!

The tournament was to be held the last week in May. And the preceding Saturday morning I meandered over to the drum major's house where I found him leading an imaginary band in and out among the bushes.

But did I ever leap for cover when he sent the shiny, tasseled baton whirling into the air, it being his clever intention, of course, to catch it nimbly when it came down. And it is well for

me, let me tell you, that I did jump. For he missed the whirling stick by at least three feet.

I jiggled my handkerchief through the barn door.

"Is it safe to come out?" I inquired cautiously, when he recognized my peace signal.

"You aren't funny, Jerry Todd," he scowled.

"How'd it be," I suggested brightly, referring to the tricky baton, "if you tied a halter on it? Then you could kind of lead it around, cow fashion, without any danger of it jumping out of the pasture."

"What pasture?" says he, still scowling.

"Any pasture," says I liberally.

Here our old enemy, Bid Stricker, stuck his homely mug over the alley fence.

"Haw! haw! haw!" jeered the newcomer, who, it seems, had been watching the practicing drum major through a convenient knot hole. "What you need, butter fingers, is a big basket."

Another mug then came into sight.

"Yah," says Jimmy Stricker, Bid's mean cousin, "I guess you could catch it, all right, if you had a basket as big as the town."

If you are a regular reader of my books, you'll need no lengthy introduction to the Stricker gang, of which Bid and Jimmy are the leaders. Other members of the crummy gang, all from Zulutown,

which is the name that the Tutter people have for the tough west-side section, are Hib and Chet Milden, brothers, and Jum Prater.

Except for Red and Chet the members of the rival gangs are all about the same age. And do we ever have some hot battles! Oh, baby! We've come to expect interference from Bid every time we start anything new. For it seems to be his chief ambition to want to smash up our stuff. That's why we have such a general dislike for him.

"Some drum major," sneered Hib, lining up his mug beside the two Strickers.

Then up bobbed Chet and Jum.

"Are those freckles on his face," says Jum, poking fun at the sweating drum major, "or dirt pimples?"

"Maybe it's clay pimples," says Jimmy.

"There *is* such a thing as red clay," nodded Chet.

"Is that what makes his hair red, too?" says Jum, kind of innocent-like.

"All baboons have red hair," says Bid learnedly.

"And freckles," put in Chet.

"Boy, I'm glad it isn't me," says Jimmy. "I sure would hate to look like that."

"Yah," says Bid, "imagine having to look at *that* face in a mirror."

"Suffering cats!" squeaked Jum. "Did you see him open his mouth? It looked like a trapdoor."

"Maybe he's a human fly catcher," says Bid.

Red, of course, was madder than heck. For he hates above all else to be called a baboon. But instead of rushing at them in his usual hot-headed way, he darted into the bushes. And did I ever yip with joy when he came back dragging a basket of rotten apples that his father had earlier lugged out of the cellar.

Sweet essence of sauerkraut! Bid surely would get his now.

It was no easy matter, though, for us to sock the jeering Strickers with our decayed fruit. For every time we fired a broadside they ducked, the soft apples either going over the fence or squashing harmlessly against the weathered boards. And did they ever smell sour!—meaning the rotten apples, of course, and not the fence boards. Wough! Later Mrs. Higgins bawled us out to beat the cars, telling us that her whole house, as it was swept by the summer breezes, smelled like a vinegar factory.

"Ya, ya, ya," Bid guardedly poked his mug into sight. "You guys couldn't hit the broad side of a bloated alligator."

Under his directions they then showered us with tin cans. But by watching our chance, and

pretending fake throws, we finally put Jum out of business.

Boy, he spit apple seeds clear over the barn.

"Apple butter," shrieked Red, next socking Jimmy Stricker in the bread basket. Then, to our good fortune, I got a crack at Bid through a big knot hole. After which the whole gang took to its heels.

Following them down the alley, and screeching at the top of our voices, so excited were we over our victory, we cracked Hib a hot one in the seat of his pants. Then Chet got an equally warm one in the same tender spot.

The day had started with bright sunshine. But now, as is the way with May weather, black clouds came suddenly into sight. And when the expected rain came tumbling down Red and I legged it into the barn where we were shortly joined by Peg Shaw and Rory Ringer, the latter of whom had come over to teach us how to play an old English card game called "Sir Hinkle Funnyduster."

Peg Shaw, you will remember, is one of the original members of our gang, of which, for a long time, Scoop Ellery was the sole leader. But lately the leadership has been divided between Scoop and Poppy Ott. A big guy for his age, Peg is one of the town's peachiest scrappers, which doesn't mean, though, that he goes around

picking scraps. I guess not. He's everybody's friend until someone starts shoving him around. And then—oh, baby, how he can make the fur fly! As we told him, when he joined us in the barn, on the roof of which the raindrops were dancing a crazy jig, it was too bad he hadn't arrived a few minutes sooner.

Born in England, and recently transplanted to this country, Rory Ringer has a lingo consisting mainly of subtracted and added "H's" that would make a cow laugh. Sir Hinkle Funnyduster, he told us (only *he* called it "Sir 'Inkle Funnyduster"), was a very popular game with the boys in England. And I could very well believe it. For a funnier game I never played in all my life.

There were twenty illustrated cards, divided into four groups. The first group consisted of Sir Hinkle Funnyduster, his wife, son, daughter and pet turtle. The second group consisted of Bottles the butler, his wife, son, daughter and pet cat. The third group consisted of Spade the gardener, his wife, son, daughter and spade. And the fourth group consisted of Whip the horseman, his wife, son, daughter and whip.

"Hi'll take Sir 'Inkle Funnyduster from Red," says Rory, when the cards had been dealt around, each of us having five to start with.

Red, though, didn't have "Sir 'Inkle." And when it came his turn to call for a card he asked

Rory for Sir Hinkle's wife. But *I* was the one who had the "wife" card, together with the one picturing the odd turtle. So, knowing that Red hadn't Sir Hinkle, the wife or the turtle, it wasn't hard for me to call the name of the card that he did have, after which I called on Rory for the fifth card, thus completing a "book."

From which you'll see that the game is played somewhat like "Authors." We had to say "Thank you," though, each time we accepted a requested card. And if a player called "Duster" on us, because of some error that had been made, the player who was caught had to give up all his cards to the one "Dustering" him. He, in turn, watched his chance to "Duster" another player. And it was these "Thank yous" (that were frequently overlooked) and "Dusters" that made the game exicting.

"I'll take Bottles the butler from Jerry," says Peg, when the cards had been dealt around for a new game. And having the requested card I gave it up.

Red almost jumped over the box that we were using for a table.

"Duster!" he yelled at the top of his voice.

"How do you get that way?" scowled Peg, shoving his cards out of the smaller one's reach.

"You forgot to say, 'Thank you.' "

Then did we ever yip when Red, in accepting Peg's cards, made the same error.

"Duster!" yelled Rory.

And there he was with all of his own cards, all of Red's and all of Peg's. But he didn't keep them long. For Red soon "Dustered" him.

"I want Sir Hinkle Funnyfuster from Jerry," says Red.

"Sir Hinkle Funnyfuster!" I jeered.

"I mean Sir Hinkle Honeyfuster."

"You big nut!"

"Oh, shucks, you know what I mean."

"Well, say it."

"I want——"

"Sir Pinkle Pennyfister," prompted Peg, with twinkling eyes.

"No, I don't want Sir Penny Picklefister. I want——"

"Sir Dinkle Donkeyduster," next suggested old hefty.

"Oh, shut up," Red tore his hair. "You've got me rattled."

Then it came Peg's turn.

"I want Sir Hinkle Funnyduffer's— What's he got, anyway?"

"Whiskers," says I.

"Sure thing," laughed Red. "Somebody cough up Sir Hinkle's whiskers for Peg."

"Don't forget," put in Rory, with further reference to old Funnyduster's anatomy, "that 'e's got 'air."

"How about his 'eart," says I, "and his hears?"

"Haw! haw! haw!" boomed Red. "Somebody else is getting razzed now."

You may wonder why I'm telling you so much about this new game of ours. But, as you will learn later on, it has an important bearing on my story. At the moment, Sir Hinkle Funnyduster was merely a pictured card to us. Strangely, though, we were soon to have the name given to us by a queer old man who claimed the title as his own.

Poppy Ott came in when the fun was at its height. And sharing my seat with him (for he and I are bosom pals), I explained how the game was played, after which we tried it five-handed.

The shower having passed over, we then went outside, Red making the boast that he could catch the flying baton six times out of seven. But even better than that (to our amazement) he caught it eight times in succession.

"But whatever put that idea into your head?" quizzed Poppy, when the chesty drum major explained how he was going to perform these juggling tricks at the head of the procession.

"Oh, I saw it done in a movie."

"Kid," says Poppy soberly, patting the smaller one on the back, "I'm proud of you. We may never win a prize for playing tunes. But it's a cinch our drum major ought to win a prize."

"He's all right," Peg put in generously, "if he keeps his face covered up."

"Go lay an egg," scowled Red. "If anybody happens to ask you I'm as good looking as you are."

Peg turned up his nose.

"Red hair," he jeered, "and freckles."

"Sure thing," Red pushed out his mug in that scrappy way of his. "And I'm glad that I am red-headed and freckled." His voice changed. "I don't suppose you ever heard of Wesley Barry."

"Who's he?" grinned Peg. "Some poor relation of yours?"

"He's a movie actor. And his freckles have earned a fortune for him. Besides," Red kind of stepped around, "everybody knows that Clara Bow is red-headed."

"Clara Bow!" jeered Peg, who dearly loves to get Red's goat. "A lot *you* know about her."

A kind of mysterious look crept into the freckled one's eyes. Wondering at it, I afterwards remembered it.

"I could tell you things that would surprise you," he spoke in riddles.

"Meaning which?" Peg urged curiously.

But the freckled one's only answer was a tantalizing laugh.

Here our attention was drawn to Eva Ringer, Rory's spunky little sister, who, it seems, was the true owner of the "Sir Hinky-dink" cards, as we jokingly called them. But, strangely, the "turtle" card had disappeared. At Rory's request we turned our pockets inside out. And then, thinking that the missing card might have fallen through a crack in the floor, we crawled under the barn. But to no success. If a magician had used his magic wand on the card it couldn't have disappeared more completely.

Had some thief made off with it? I wondered. But why, I asked myself, should a thief take only the one card? And who was the unknown thief? Certainly, not Bid Stricker. For if given the chance he would have taken the whole pack.

Quite unknown to us a mystery was creeping in on us. And we were soon to learn amazing things.

CHAPTER II

SIR HINKLE HIMSELF

To SEE Poppy Ott to-day, so tall and straight and manly-looking—and to my notion there isn't a finer-looking or smarter kid in the whole world —you'd never suspect that a short time ago he and his father were common tramps.

But such is the case. And long will I remember the day I met Poppy in the big willow patch in Happy Hollow, where he and his father were camping in a rickety covered wagon. There was an old horse, too, named Julius Cæsar, whose hip joints stood out of its skinny frame like scrawny chair knobs. On top of being a rover by nature, Mr. Ott had a lot of silly detective notions. Poppy, though, having a great deal more sense than his shiftless father, wanted to settle down and be somebody. And in the end he won out, even prevailing upon his father to give up his silly detecting and go to work in Dad's brick yard.

To-day Mr. Ott, a changed man, is the bustling general manager of the stilt business that

Poppy and I started in the old carriage factory on Water Street. Of course, in the beginning it was a very small business, as any business naturally would be that was gotten up by boys. But Poppy (who, I might add here, got his odd nickname from peddling popcorn) had a lot of good ideas. And he put these ideas to work, to the result, as I say, that the stilt business is now a paying proposition.

It's fun to go to Poppy's house. For he and his father are all wrapped up in each other. And while Mr. Ott never admits it, or even talks about it, I dare say that he is ashamed of his earlier shiftless life as it probably helped to bring about his wife's death. For it's a fact that he and Poppy, as they wandered here and there, first in one state and then in another, frequently went without food. As for clothing, Poppy in particular when I first met him had barely enough ragged garments to cover his bare skin.

Through my close association with him (and a better chum no boy ever had), a lot of added fun has come into my life, as the books that I have written about him testify. Not only do I think the world and all of him, but it makes me happy to know that he has the same warm feeling for me. Once we went on a hitch-hike. Boy, that was some adventure! Spooks, creepy noises in a haunted house and other queer truck. Then

we got tangled up in separate "Freckled Goldfish" and "Tittering Totem" mysteries, though, as I say, we little dreamed that we were now rubbing noses with a brand new mystery.

Another shower having driven Eva home, with the final spiteful threat (directed at Rory) that " 'e'd catch hit for losin' one of 'er nice cards," we later applauded Red in the yard as he tossed the whirling baton higher and higher into the air with scarcely a miss.

Say, he was hot!

Then, banging on tin pans and the like, we marched around the yard single file, pretending that we were a band of musicians (the neighbors thought we were a band of hoodlums, I guess) which gave the drum major an added chance to exercise his juggling talents. Instead of gumming things up for us, as usual, I could see now that he was going to be our band's biggest attraction.

"And to think," Poppy whispered to me on the sly, as we melodiously sashayed in and out among the gooseberry bushes, "that we shoved him into this job to get rid of him."

"Don't ever let him find it out," I whispered back uneasily. "For you know how touchy he is."

Striking a projecting limb, the baton suddenly swerved and fell kerplunk! on the outside of the alley fence. At the same instant we heard a kind

of gurgling groan. And when we ran to the fence, hoping, of course, that it was Bid Stricker. there lay an old man on the ground.

"He's unconscious," cried Poppy, leaping the fence. "The baton must have struck him on the head."

Which indeed was the case. But imagine our surprise, when we removed the battered derby, to find that the baton's victim had a pancake tied on his bald head.

"Get some water," Poppy instructed quickly, loosening the stranger's shirt collar.

The breast, thus exposed, was covered with thick black hair, a peculiar contrast, I thought at the time, though kind of scattered-like, to the smooth bald head.

"Who is he?" Peg inquired, in a queer voice.

"Search me," says Poppy shortly. And again I caught him looking at the pancake with an expression on his face I can't describe. As you can imagine, the sight of the pancake, which was held in place by a knotted handkerchief, had amazed all of us. But even more than being amazed, the leader, I saw, was plainly puzzled.

"A pancake," I heard him mutter to himself. "A buckwheat pancake. Well, I'll be jiggered."

One time when we were camping the kids fooled me with a rubber "weenie." But I saw right off that this was no rubber pancake.

Anyway, why should a man (unless he was cuckoo) wear a rubber pancake on his bald head? Or, to the same point, why should a man wear *any* kind of pancake on his bald head, rubber or otherwise?

"He must be a nut," I told Poppy.

"Even more than that, Jerry," was the leader's peculiar reply, "he's a mystery."

"Then you think he was spying on us through the fence?" I inquired eagerly.

"There can be no doubt of that. And I suspect, too, that he's the fellow who wrote the 'pancake' letter."

"Pancake letter?" I repeated, eager to get the details. "What pancake letter do you mean?"

But Poppy had no time just then to explain his queer words. For Red, the clumsy boob, having climbed the fence, upset the contents of a water pail in the grizzled face, which, as you can imagine, brought the prostrate one to his senses in short order.

"Did—did I git ketched in the rain?" he inquired vaguely, looking at us with dizzy blue eyes.

Then, as his memory returned with a rush, he jerked the battered derby down on his ears and scrambled quickly to his feet.

"Um . . ." he scowled at us. "What business have you b'ys got a-peekin' at my pancake?"

"You were knocked senseless," explained

Poppy. "And we were trying to help you."

"Yes, and it was *you* who did it, too," the old man turned a pair of baleful eyes on the drum major, which proved, all right, that he *had* been watching us through the fence, as we suspected.

He then went off down the alley, kind of stiff-like in his legs, turning occasionally in the stooped way so common with old people to look back at us. And once I thought I heard him chuckle.

Red had to mow the lawn that afternoon. And having coaxed Peg and Rory to help him (like the lazy little runt that he is), Poppy and I, thus left to our own devices, resurrected a pair of cane fishing poles and set out for the old mill pond in Pirate's Bend, which is the odd name that the Tutter people have for the upper end of Happy Hollow where the big Piginsorgum Creek (I guess that name will hold you for a while!) joins Clark's Creek.

It was here, years and years ago, that a man by the name of Amasa Gimp built a mill, which in time became known as Gimp's pancake mill. For the old miller (the story goes that he turned from piracy to milling) made a specialty of buckwheat flour. He had a secret formula, or whatever you call it, and so delicious were the pancakes made of his compounded flour that the farmers within driving distance would have no other. Even the Indians came on their spotted ponies to

barter trinkets of their own manufacture for bags of the coveted flour; and it was one of these friendly Indians who told the miller about the hidden lead mine, now called the lost lead mine.*

Inheriting the mill from his father, Peter Gimp, the eldest son, now a white-haired old man, let the promising business go to rack and ruin. The shingled roof of the stone building, with its accompanying stone dam, is covered with moss, as is also the miller's near-by cottage, both buildings having the appearance of being hundreds of years old.

In sharp contrast of his brother's known poverty, Sylvester Gimp has made a fortune out of the hinge factory that he started on the east bank of the mill pond. In the beginning it was under-

*I had intended, if possible, to include in this volume the exciting incidents attending Poppy's later search for the long-lost lead mine. But I saw, as I got deeper into my "pancake" story, that I would have to make the mine, with its strange secrets dating back to Indian days, the subject of a separate volume and hence provided for this footnote. The book, of course, containing all the old characters, Red, Rory, Jerry, Scoop, Peg, Davey Jones and the complete Stricker gang, together with a queer old man who claims that the Indians handed down to him the secret of rain making, will be jammed full of fun, floods and mystery. *Poppy Ott Hits the Trail*—Such is the title. A book that will particularly appeal to the Boy Scouts and others who love the mellow notes of a bugle at dawn; who love the intermingled fragrance of wood smoke and frying bacon; in whose hearts the joys of camping and the great out of doors reigns supreme. It is my promise to you, my dear readers, that the coming volume will be one of the best books that I have written. For I, too, am a lover of the open. And the writing of the book will be a great and glorious adventure to me.—LEO EDWARDS.

stood that he and his older brother were to share the water power between them. But everybody in Tutter now knows that the wealthy hinge manufacturer controls the water power to suit himself. His factory is a barn-like building of many cheap additions, these representing the business' steady growth. And the men who work for him, in dirty, dingy rooms, are poorly paid. Dad, who is a manufacturer himself (he runs a brick yard) says it's a crying shame that such factories should be permitted to operate. But old Gimlet, as many people call the miserly hinge manufacturer (and I'll tell you frankly that I, for one, have not the slightest respect for him), keeps on year after year, crowding the workmen into greater speed and cutting down their wages, which, of course, all adds greatly to his profits.

There was still another son in the miller's family, the youngest of the three. Having quarreled with his brother Sylvester, Rufus Gimp, the father's known favorite, and, as I have been told, a dancing-eyed, reckless youth, ran away to sea, where, so the report goes, he, too, sailed under a "Jolly Roger" flag. But buccaneering wasn't so soft in those later days, and instead of retiring to some secluded corner of the earth in pattern of his father (granting that the stories of the miller's early life are true), he ended up in an English prison where the official hangsman put

him out of the way. The letter telling of his favorite son's dishonorable death literally killed the old miller, following whose funeral the fortunes of the crafty middle brother began to rise and those of the elder brother to fall.

And how do I know all this? Well, I've heard Dad talk about it. Then, too, old Cap'n Tinkertop, who grew up with Rufus Gimp, has told me the story time and time again. In fact, it's the kind of a story, with its background of piracy and mystery—for it isn't to be doubted that the old miller had secrets that died with him, including the probable location of the lost lead mine—that a boy likes to remember.

Overtaken by another passing shower, Poppy and I started on the run for the bridge that spans the creek below the aged stone dam, figuring that we could find shelter in the old mill, near the worn water wheel of which we planned to do our fishing. Nor did I suspect at the moment that the leader, deep kid that he is in many respects, had a secret object in coming here. I was soon to learn, though, that he was a great deal better informed on the present miller's circumstances, and the general layout of things at Pirate's Bend, than I imagined.

Just before we came within sight of the dam, at the opposite ends of which, as I have described, are the two separate water wheels, one of which

seldom turns and the other of which churns constantly, an ever-active money-making machine for its grasping owner, young Sylvester Gimp, III, or, as we call him at school, Silly Gimp, came up behind us in his grandfather's high-powered automobile. The road was narrow here and full of puddles. So, to escape a splashing, I jumped into the weeds on one side of the road and Poppy on the other.

Imagine my amazement when I tumbled over the old pancake geezer, who, hidden in the weeds, was feeding bits of raw liver to the biggest turtle that I ever set eyes on.

The turtle evidently didn't like my looks. For it made a lunge at me. And I actually believe it would have bit a hunk out of my seat-a-ma-ritis if the old man hadn't stopped it.

"Back, Davey," came the sharp nasal command. "Back, I tell you."

And as though it understood, the huge turtle kind of drew in its long legs, thus lowering itself to the ground, after which it slowly backed into the weeds until only its head showed.

"Davey ordinarily has purty good manners," the old man told me, sort of talkative-like. "But you kind of surprised him. An' bein' jest a turtle, after all, we'll have to kind of excuse him."

And again, as though it understood what was

being said, the turtle, whose shell was as big as a washtub, crawled out of the weeds and held up one of its front flappers to me, which, the beaming owner explained, was its way of indicating to me that it wanted to be friends.

"No," the old man seemed to read my mind," you needn't be a-feered of him—not when I'm around. For he's bin brought up to mind, he has, an' he knows from experience that if he don't mind I'll take a stick to him. By cracky! I don't stand fur no monkey work from him. No, I don't."

"What would have happened," I inquired, still kind of shaky-like, "if you hadn't called him off?"

There was a short silence.

"Wa-al," came the indirect and somewhat evasive reply, "he's got a whoppin' big mouth, as you kin plainly see. An' the power in them jaws of his'n, I might say, hain't nothin' to monkey with."

My curiosity overcame my uneasiness.

"What is he?" I further inquired. "A snapping turtle?"

"Partly. Scientists call him a Galapagos turtle."

Galapagos! That, I recalled, was the name of a tropical island famed for its big turtles.

"His complete name," the old man told me,

"is Davey Jones. An' so fur as I know to the contrary he's the only eddicated turtle in the world."

Nor did I doubt *that!*

"Me an' him," the old man then went on, sort of reminiscent-like, "has bin travelin' companions fur more'n forty years, prior to which time he lived a somewhat monotonous life on Boot Island, boots an' shoes, I might add, bein' the *one* thing he won't eat. But when they put *me* on the island, expectin' Davey, of course, to gobble me up jest as he had gobbled up dozens of other unfortunate seafarin' men whose empty boots was the only thing left on the beach to tell of their terrible fate, he right off took a fancy to me an' me to him, which friendship, as I say, me an' him havin' escaped from the island on a raft, me ridin' an' him towin', has endured to this day."

Probably the old man knew what he was talking about. But this scattered gab didn't make sense to me.

"Wasn't that the Gimp b'y who jest drove by here in a red autymobile?" he then inquired, with a sharper look in his faded blue eyes.

"Yes, sir," I nodded.

"Friend of your'n?" came the added inquiry.

I laughed.

"No," I shook my head, "Sylvester Gimp is no friend of mine."

People hate a tattler. So I didn't tell the old man in detail what a smart aleck Silly was, and how he tried to lord it over the other kids of his age (which is the reason I detest him), it being his notion, I guess, that his grandfather's money gives him power. But somehow, from the odd look on the old man's face—and not until this moment did I wonder if he still had the buckwheat pancake on his bald head!—I had the feeling that he was reading my thoughts.

He asked me then in a quiet voice about the two brothers who had inherited the water power from their father. And a kind of hard look came into his wrinkled face when I told him about Sylvester Gimp's great business success and the older brother's failure.

Then, getting a call from Poppy, who was waiting for me down the road, I started to go, but stopped when the old man got slowly to his feet.

"My name is Funnyduster," he said, gravely offering me his gnarled hand. "Sir Hinkle Funnyduster. And this," he pointed, "is my pet turtle."

Sir Hinkle Funnyduster! Well, say! You could have knocked me over with a feather.

CHAPTER III

TROUBLE AT THE BRIDGE

I WAS further reminded of Amasa Gimp, the pioneer miller, as I hurried down the bumpy, weed-bordered stone road that connects the old mill and its neighboring hinge factory with the highway. For like the old mill itself this stone road, I had been told, was the early miller's work. Those following him, though, had been too indifferent and too miserly to keep it up. In places the flat stones, so helpful to the early farmers, had completely disappeared into the black earth, leaving holes that the recent showers, as mentioned, had turned into small lakes. A few loads of gravel would have nicely repaired the private right of way, used principally by the hinge manufacturer and his trudging workmen. But old Gimlet was too fond of his growing wealth to spend even a small part of it for gravel or other public improvements. Nor did he care a rap whether his poorer brother, who also used the road, approved of its condition or not. I guess, though, that Peter Gimp was too deeply

wrapped up in his silly inventions to worry about roads.

Eager to overtake Poppy, to tell him about my startling experience with the big turtle and its undoubtedly mysterious owner, I made another flying leap into the weeds when a second automobile overtook me. But this time the car stopped.

"Oh! . . ." cried Majorie Van Ness, recognizing me. "Here you are now."

"Hi," I grinned.

Marjorie is all right, I guess, only I'd like her better if she hadn't so many grown-up ideas. And what she can see in Silly Gimp is beyond me. But I've been told that she's kind of crazy over him. Girls sure are funny. I could understand perfectly why any girl with sense should fall for old Poppy. But that goofy Gimp kid! *Good* night! If a sister of mine took a shine to him I'd feel tempted to wring her neck.

"I have something for you, Jerry," Marjorie smiled brightly.

"What is it?" I inquired, when she handed me a neat white envelope.

"An invitation to my birthday party."

"Thanks," says I politely.

"And here's one for Poppy."

I thanked her again.

"I was told," says she, looking down the road,

"that I'd find Sylvester Gimp at his grandfather's factory."

"Sure thing," I nodded. "He just passed here."

I could see that she felt pretty big sitting behind the steering wheel of her father's car. She looked nice, too. A swell little kid, all right.

"So long," she waved, starting off. "Don't forget that I'll be expecting you to dance with me the night of my party."

Gosh! It would be some dance, I thought, grinning sheepish-like to myself, if *I* had anything to do with it. For when it comes to dancing I'm about as graceful as the bird they call the cow.

Opening my invitation I studied it as I walked slowly down the winding road. Later, having joined Poppy near the dam, he and I studied the corresponding invitations together.

"Queer," says I finally.

"What's queer?" says he.

"That Marjorie should send you a separate invitation. For you could have gone with me just as well as not."

He saw what I meant.

"Don't be dumb, Jerry. She never expected you to bring me."

"But everybody around here knows that we're bosom pals," says I earnestly.

"Of course," says he warmly.

"And the invitation reads: 'Yourself and friend.' "

"Jerry," he laughed, "you seem to forget that you're growing up."

"I'm reminded of it," I grinned, sharing his mood, "every time Dad buys me a new suit."

"Marjorie expects you to bring a girl."

I stared at him. A *girl!* Gee-miny crickets! *Me* take a girl to a party. I began to sweat. For I saw, all right, smart kid that he is, that he had hit the nail on the head.

Some more of Marjorie's grown-up ideas!

"Are you going to the party, Jerry?"

"To tell the truth I'm not crazy about it. For Lawyer Van Ness and his wife put on too many airs to suit me. Besides, I've never had any practice rushing girls around. Doesn't the thought of it scare you, Poppy?"

He pushed out his chest manfully.

"Me?" he kind of strutted around. "I should say not."

"Who are you going to take?" I quizzed curiously.

"Oh, give me time," he hedged.

"What does R.S.V.P. mean?" I then inquired, studying the quartet of capital letters in the lower left-hand corner of the neat invitation.

"Marjorie's ma wants you to bring a pie," he grinned.

"A pie?" says I, searching his face.

"Sure thing. The 'P' stands for 'pie.' And the first of the four letters stands for 'raspberry.' A 'raspberry pie.' See?"

He was kidding me.

"And the 'S.V.', turned around, stands for 'veal sandwiches,' I suppose."

"Correct," he further grinned, like the big monkey that he is.

"Honest, Poppy," says I, "what does it stand for, anyway?"

"It means that you've to 'respond if you please.' It's French."

"Some class," says I. "I wonder where Marjorie found out about it."

He laughed.

"You'll have to borrow your pa's dress suit, Jerry."

"Yah, watch me. . . . I think I'll stay at home with Red Meyers and eat licorice."

At this time of the year the Gimp mill pond is usually full to the brim. For the frequent seasonable showers swell the two streams that empty into it. Clark's Creek, named after an early owner, extends into the hilly northern country for more than two miles, having its source above a waterfall of the same name.

Piginsorgum Creek, too, stretching in a westernly direction, is of considerable length. So the stone dam that Amasa Gimp built, with its accompanying pond, supplies considerable power. Fed by springs, Clark's Creek never has been known to go dry. And if you think Clark's Falls isn't a beautiful sight I wish you'd drop around there sometime, preferably after a heavy shower, and take a look at it. Boy, I sure do love the country around here, with its hills and hollows.

We found old Cap'n Tinkertop working on the bridge below the dam. And when I stopped to speak to him about his new job it seemed to me that he acted kind of queer. Anyway, if I must tell you the truth, it was a big surprise to me to find him jiggling a crowbar around. For usually he sits in his bird store and takes life easy, perfectly satisfied if he has a peck of spuds on hand or a doughnut or two. Of course, I wouldn't want to say outright that he's lazy. For he and I are the best of friends. On the other hand I could think of a dozen things that were more liable to take him off than overwork. Still, why shouldn't he loaf, if he wants to? For he's an old man. And with his peg-leg it isn't easy for him to get around.

"No wonder," says I, "that I found your store locked up yesterday afternoon."

"Yep," he spit on his hands. "I'm workin'

here now. But if you'll come around this evenin' you'll find the store open as usual. I never did do much business durin' the day, anyway."

"What do you call yourself?" I grinned, referring to his work. "A bridge builder?"

"I hain't a-doin' no buildin' on it, Jerry," he replied. "I'm jest tearin' it down."

"Tearing it down?" Poppy spoke up quickly. "Do you mean you're going to discontinue it altogether?"

"Them's ol' Gimlet's orders."

"You hadn't better call him that to his face," I grinned. "Or you'll be looking for another new job."

Up went his warty nose.

"Humph! I wouldn't lose much if I lost this job. They hain't no pay in it to speak of, nor satisfaction nor nothin' else. Fur what satisfaction could a man git workin' fur an old skinflint like him?"

Poppy, I noticed, looked troubled.

"But if you tear the bridge down," says he, "how can the miller get across the creek?"

"You go put that question to ol' Gimlet," replied the Cap'n. "He's the boss. Oh-hum! The best part about this job is when the six o'clock whistle blows. . . . Got anything to eat in your pockets?"

I gave him a couple of soiled gumdrops.

"Souvenirs?" says he dryly, spitting out a tack that had lodged in one of the soft pieces.

"Beggars shouldn't be choosers," I grinned.

Then who should heave into sight but old Gimlet, himself.

"What's the meaning of this, Cap'n?" boomed the big-bodied newcomer in his important blustering way. "Why aren't you at work? I can't afford to have this job drag along forever. And be careful, as I told you, about dropping those boards in the creek. For we can use every bit of this old lumber in the boiler room."

"An' how about the ol' nails?" drawled the Cap'n, sort of winking at us on the sly. "Is it your plan to have me save 'em so that you kin use 'em when you go fishin'?"

"Um. . . . What do you mean?" came sharply.

"You-all *could* use 'em fur sinkers, couldn't you?"

Instead of snickering, like me, Poppy stepped out in front of the red-faced manufacturer as sober as you please.

"Is it true, Mr. Gimp, that you're planning to discontinue this bridge?"

"Um . . ." the grunt was accompanied by a dark unfriendly scowl. "Who wants to know?"

"I do," says Poppy quietly.

"And who are you?" the words were snapped out sharply.

"The guy who socked your grandson on the nose last month," was Poppy's unexpected reply.

Well, say! I thought old Gimlet would keel over into the creek.

"Get out of here," he thundered. "This is private property. So move before I move you with the toe of my boot."

He was four times as big as us. In fact he was one of the biggest men in town, with a huge red face, a hammock-like chin and broad shoulders. His hands were like hams. But did we cower? Not so you could notice it.

"And in addition to being the guy who gently socked your grandson," Poppy added, in a peculiarly steady voice, "I'm the guy who's going to help your brother run his pancake mill. So, as we need this bridge, you better think twice before you wreck it. For it's just as much ours as yours."

Old Gimlet had to work his huge jaws several seconds before he could find his voice.

"You insolent young puppy," he thundered. "If you go messing into my affairs I'll wring your blasted neck. I've heard about you and your confounded Pedigreed Pickles. You may have

gotten the best of that Pennykorn bunch. But you can't get the best of me."

"The point is," says Poppy quietly, "do you leave the bridge stand as it is, or don't you?"

There was a short silence.

"Have you been talking with my brother?" old Gimlet then inquired.

"How could he have hired me to help him run the mill," says Poppy, "if we hadn't talked it over?"

"Then he *has* hired you?"

"I think he showed mighty good judgment if he did. Don't you think so, Mr. Gimp?"

The Cap'n had been resting on his crowbar.

"Wa-al," he put in, very well pleased with the situation, "do I further wreck it, or don't I?"

"Let the job rest," says old Gimlet, "until I find out from my brother how much of this boy's story is true."

We watched him stomp across the sagging bridge and disappear into the mill.

"The ol' skunk," scowled the Cap'n. "How men kin git that mean is beyond me."

Evidently the irritated hinge manufacturer found the mill deserted. For he shortly reappeared in the mill yard. Nor did he arouse anybody in the adjacent cottage.

I looked at Poppy curiously.

"Were you telling him the truth?" I inquired.

"Partly," was my chum's reply.

"And are you really going to work for the miller?"

"Sure thing."

"When did he hire you?"

"He hasn't hired me yet."

I knew *that* kid!

"Poppy," says I, "tell me the unvarnished truth: Have you said anything to the miller about working for him?"

The other grinned. And if there's anything in this world any sweller than one of Poppy's ear-to-ear grins, when he's in a mood like that, I'd like to have you trot it out. Boy, I sure love that kid. Solid gold all the way through—that's *him,* all right.

Evidently he had found out that the miller was in trouble. In the same big-hearted way he had found out that old Patsy Corbin, as featured in the *Tittering Totem* book, was in trouble, and others. And just as he had helped them, even cranking up his sturdy young fists and fighting for them, he was now planning to help old Peter, as the miller was affectionately spoken of by his neighbors.

"Well," says I, "I'm waiting."

"For what?" the leader further grinned.

"For an answer to my question."

"What was it?"

"I asked you if you really had said anything to the miller about working for him."

"No."

"What are you going to do?" says I. "Work for him whether he wants you to or not?"

"Oh," the word was accompanied by a free-and-easy laugh, "he'll want me to, all right, when I tell him what a swell scheme I have for popularizing his pancake flour. There's millions in it, Jerry."

"And what *is* your scheme?" I inquired eagerly.

"I haven't given it any thought yet."

I looked at him steadily.

"You're cuckoo," I told him.

But I didn't mean it. There was a time, as written down in my earlier book, when I doubted him. I thought he was acting too big for his shoes. The idea of *boys* trying to run stilt and pickle factories! But I have unlimited confidence in him now. A born business man. That's what *he* is.

And I was kind of glad that he had chipped in on the miller's side. For it was plain to be seen that old Gimlet, arrogant, blustering slave driver that he was, and a power in the commun-

ity because of his great wealth (thank heaven there are few like him in this world), had no regard for his brother's rights at all.

Gee! Wouldn't it be bully, I thought, the blood jumping through my veins, if Poppy could put new life into the old pancake mill. Half of the water power was the miller's. And I, for one, was ready to stand back of him and see that he got it.

There'd be a battle, of course. That was to be expected. But I was ready to fight both with my fists and my wits. So was Poppy. He had started out to land a fish or two (we still had our cane fishing poles). But instead he had landed a partnership in a run-down pancake mill. Of course, a few little details had to be worked out, such as informing the miller that he had a new partner. But details such as that were mere pie and ice cream to old Poppy.

CHAPTER IV

DAVEY STRUTS HIS STUFF

Poppy got his eyes on something.

"Look!" he cried, pointing excitedly to the mill pond. "There's the old pancake geezer riding on a raft."

"Yah," says I, as a red speed boat shot into sight from a boathouse on the east shore near the hinge factory, "and there's Silly Gimp hot on the trespasser's trail, too."

I had heard about Silly's new racer, and how he had ordered all the other boats off the big pond so that he could have it entirely to himself, selfish snob that he is. But this was the first time that I had seen the expensive boat perform. With its high-powered out-board motor it sure was a nifty little outfit. I kind of wished that I had one just like it. Still I wouldn't have traded places with that kid for all the motor boats in the world. Money isn't everything. Nor is the stuff that money buys everything. Character, I've found, and the right kind of thoughts in a fellow's head, are what counts.

Cutting through the water at high speed Silly stopped with a grand flourish beside the slow-moving raft.

"Git that junk out of here," he ordered in his overbearing way. "And see that you keep it out of here, too. For this is a private pond."

It hadn't occurred to him, I guess, to wonder what made the raft move. But I knew! And was I ever excited! Gee-miny crickets!

"It's Davey Jones!" I cried, clutching my chum's arm. "There! He just stuck up his head. Do you see?"

That didn't make sense to Poppy.

"What are you talking about?" says he, shoving a curious look at me.

"The big turtle," says I, in continued excitement. "See? He's towing the raft."

"What big turtle?" Poppy further inquired.

I told him then about my strange adventure in the weed patch. I had met old Sir Hinkle Funnyduster himself, I said. And he had a pet turtle with a shell as big as a washtub.

"Which reminds me," says Poppy pleasantly, "of the time I met Sir Christopher Columbus. Would you care to hear about it, and how I helped him trim the corns of his pet rattlesnake?"

"Honest, Poppy," I waggled, "I really tumbled over the old man in the weeds. And, as I

say, he was feeding hunks of raw liver to the biggest turtle that I ever set eyes on. It's an educated turtle too. It minds him just like a kid.

Convinced now that I was telling the truth the other searched my face.

"And he gave you the name of Sir Hinkle Funnyduster?"

I nodded.

"Which proves plainly enough," the leader put his ready wits to work, "where the missing card went to. This old geezer was hiding in the barn. See? During the game he heard us talking about a 'turtle' card. And having a turtle of his own, curiously, he was attracted to the cards when we dropped them and left the barn. Sir Hinkle Funnyduster! Just the name he needed. And to remember it he pocketed the card. . . . Did he talk like Rory?"

"No," I shook my head.

"There you are!" Poppy spoke with conviction. "He's no more Sir Hinkle Funnyduster than you or I. For Englishmen all talk alike."

"But who is he?" says I, bewildered-like.

"That," says Poppy, kind of shutting his teeth down hard on the word, "is what we're going to find out."

"Detective stuff, huh?" says I happily, recalling other mysteries that we had solved.

"Nothing else but," says he.

I fell into thought.

"He must have had an object," says I, "in giving me that particular name, and an added object in hiding in the barn."

"Even queerer," says Poppy, with a puzzled look, "is his 'pancake' letter—granting that he *is* the one who wrote the odd letter. . . . Did you ever hear of anybody using buckwheat pancakes to restore hair to bald heads?"

I stared at him.

"It sounds cuckoo, all right. But the old miller has a letter from a man who claims that Gimp's Fancy Mixture did that very thing for him, believe me."

"Grew new hair on his bald head?" I inquired skeptically.

"Sure thing. The miller, of course, took it for granted that the letter was a joke. I did, too. But there may be something in it, Jerry. Otherwise why should this old geezer with the turtle go around with a pancake under his hat? Probably it was his interest in the supposed miraculous flour that brought him here."

Good deduction, all right. Still I was smart enough to see a flaw.

"If the man who wrote the letter had a new crop of hair," says I, "it certainly couldn't have

been *this* geezer. For he's as bald as a baby's palate."

"You're right," Poppy agreed, with a thoughtful shake of his head. "But, even so, I still believe there's some connection between this goofy newcomer and the letter writer."

"And you say you saw the letter?"

"Day before yesterday," he nodded.

I looked at him curiously.

"I never heard," says I, "that the miller was particularly interested in you."

"Pa did some lathe work for him. That's how I got acquainted with him. And being interested in inventions myself I dropped in on him last Thursday to see what he had, thus getting a look at the unusual letter."

"Did he show you his 'floating' piano stool?" I grinned.

"Sure thing."

"Is he still working on it?"

"No. For he found out months ago that there's no market for piano stools, floating or otherwise. Benches are the style nowadays."

"He ought to design a floating bench," I gave another grin.

"Don't make fun of him, Jerry. For he's really sincere in his work, however silly his contrivances may seem to outsiders. I never knew

a kinder man. And it was this natural kindness of his that started him in search of a more comfortable piano stool."

"What's he working on now?" I inquired.

"Another hinge."

"*Another* hinge?" I emphasized the word, my thoughts, of course, jumping to the near-by hinge factory. "What do you mean?"

"It's a secret, Jerry."

"Well," says I, "did I ever blab any of your stuff when told to keep shut on it?"

He pointed toward the rambling hinge factory through the open windows of which we could hear the drone of machinery.

"Do you see that factory, Jerry?"

"Sure thing."

"Do you know how it got its start?"

"No."

"A natural-born mechanic, and more interested in machinery than pancake flour, the miller, many years ago, devised a hinge with coil springs in it. Something entirely new. He showed it to his younger brother. And there you are."

"Do you mean to tell me," says I, "that old Gimlet stole the invention and put it on the market in his own name?"

"It isn't always safe, Jerry, to call a man a thief, especially a substantial business man like

Mr. Sylvester Gimp. For money has certain powers. But I have the old miller's word for it that he invented the hinge that has brought wealth to his younger brother. The inventor himself, so far as I know, never got a dollar out of it."

I did some quick thinking.

"Then," says I, "it's hinges of new design that you're going to manufacture instead of buckwheat flour, as you let on to old blunderbuss?"

"No," the leader slowly shook his head. "I think there's bigger possibilities in Gimp's Fancy Mixture than in the old miller's inventions. For think of all the bald heads in this world!"

"You're joking!" I told him.

"Partly," he laughed. "But Gimp's Fancy Mixture *is* wonderful stuff. *Such* pancakes! Um-yum-yum! He could sell tons of the compounded flour if it was properly advertised. I told him so the other day. And I tried to talk him into using lithographed containers instead of plain paper bags. People want food stuff put up attractively these days. But he's more interested in this new hinge of his than he is in pancake flour. Lately he has done scarcely any milling at all. And I suspect that he is down to his last dollar."

Out on the pond Silly was still shooting off

his bazzoo. We could hear old Sir Hinkle, too, now squatted comfortably in the middle of the raft.

"Whose pond did you say it is?" the old man drawled in a lazy voice.

"Mine," Silly spoke the word importantly. "I own it all. It's my private race course."

"An' doesn't Mr. Peter Gimp, the miller, own any part of it?"

"Him?" Silly gave a mean laugh. "He may think he does. But my grandfather knows how to handle him."

And all this time faithful old Davey Jones, now out of sight under the water, was steadily towing the cumbersome raft toward the opposite shore.

"Didn't I tell you to go back?" Silly spoke with mounting anger, as he observed the raft's continued progress.

"But how kin I go back?" whined the old man. "Fur I hain't got no paddle nor no oars."

Silly put his wits to work.

"The wind never blew you out here," he snapped.

"No."

"Well, then, get back the same way you came."

"But I don't want to go back. I want to land on the other shore."

"You heard what I said," blustered Silly, determined to turn the old man back. "This pond is posted. It's private property. If you don't go back I'll have you arrested."

And still old Davey, a credit to his kind, plugged faithfully along.

"Stop!" Silly sought to bring matters to a sudden halt. "Stop, I tell you, or I'll sock you with this paddle."

"But I kain't stop," the old man whined helplessly.

Silly was suspicious now.

"Have you got a string tied to that raft?" he demanded.

"A string?" the words were spoken innocently. "I don't see no string. Do you?"

It was Silly's idea, I guess, that someone on the opposite shore was pulling the raft across the pond. For we saw him search the west shore with angry eyes. Then he caught sight of us.

Having had a taste of Poppy's fist on the end of his beak he, of course, loves us dearly. Oh, my, yes! Don't get the idea, though, that my chum socked him for mere pleasure. We found him picking on a crippled kid. That's why Poppy landed on him. He likes to act big and grown-up around the girls. But given the chance he'll pick on the little shavers every time.

By this time the slow-moving raft was more

than two-thirds of the way across the pond. Nor had Silly as yet discovered what was making it move. It couldn't be us, he figured, for we were on the hinge-factory side of the pond. Still, he was suspicious of us. And determined to be master of the situation he fastened a rope to the raft and started his motor.

"I'll show you," he grimly addressed the old man, "that I mean business."

Poor Davey Jones! He tried his best, I dare say, to buck the powerful motor. But it was too much for him. And I could readily imagine his indignation as he was jerked along, bottom side up, behind the raft. I could see his flappers clawing the air. And there was something in the way he handled them that made me feel that the show wasn't over yet. Good old scout! Thus far in our short acquaintance it hadn't occurred to me to take a shine to him. But I sure loved him now.

"Poppy," says I, "I have a hunch that something is going to happen when Silly gets to shore."

And something did happen. Oh, baby! I'll never forget it as long as I live. Out of the water came a four-legged fury. It was old Davey seeking vengeance. The idea of anybody dragging *him* around on his tail!—simply yanking him along without any regard whatsoever for his

dignity. *Him,* mind you, the king of Boot Island, or whatever place it was that he came from. Gr-r-r-r! Turtles of breeding can take a joke, the same as people. But this was no joke. No, sir-ee.

To Silly, I dare say, the open-jawed, scuttling turtle looked like some gigantic sea monster. Nor was the frightened one long left in doubt as to the turtle's intentions. No face, animal or otherwise, could have more faithfully portrayed its owner's feelings than did Davey's at that particular moment. Blood stood in his eyes an inch thick. Screeching at the top of his voice Silly legged it through the bulrushes for his grandpa's hinge foundry. Boy, did he ever cut the air! His hair stood out behind like some of those fancy radiator caps.

"Hel-lup!" he squawked. "Hel-lup!"

Poppy and I ran down the shore. And learning that we, too, wanted to cross the pond, old Sir Hinkle invited us, with a great show of politeness, to ride with him on his raft, Silly meanwhile watching us with baleful eyes from an upper window of his grandpa's factory.

CHAPTER V

IN THE OLD MILL

Sir Hinkle's queer actions had stirred up our suspicions. And having certain responsibilities, as Juvenile Jupiter Detectives, we had agreed to keep an eye on him. But we really had nothing against him. So it was perfectly all right for us to ride around with him if we wanted to.

And was it ever fun! Oh, baby! All boys like rafts. It's hot sport to fool around with a raft even when you have to use poles and makeshift sails, as we did (meaning our gang) the time we built a raft in the Oak Island wide waters and fought the Strickers with rotten eggs, as written down in my *Pirate* book. But imagine the added fun of being towed across the pond by that peachy turtle.

Old Davey sure was a darb. And while we made his work harder I really believe that he was pleased to have us there. For he kept looking back at us with a sort of friendly twinkle in his beady eyes. Or was he sort of watching us?

"Turtles is smart," the old man told us in a

droning voice, as the raft moved slowly through the water. "They know who's their friends. Every time. And if used right they'll use others right. That's their nature."

"Jerry tells me," Poppy continued the conversation, "that you and Davey Jones have been chums for a great many years."

"Yep," waggled the aged speaker. "An' I reckon we'll keep on bein' chums, me an' him, till one or the t'other of us is called away fur keeps."

"How old is he?"

"Um. . . ." The elder's forehead wrinkled thoughtfully. "Kain't say exactly. But I figger he's upwards of two hundred years. Fur turtles of his kind are long-lived."

"And did you bring him all the way from England?" was Poppy's crafty inquiry.

"From England?" the old man repeated, with a kind of dumb look on his wrinkled face. Then he checked himself. "Oh, yes," says he hastily. "Of course. Me an' him we come over to this country the early part of last month. I was intendin' to bring Mrs. Funnyduster, too. But at the last moment she figgered that she'd better stay at home an' take keer of things."

"Do you live in a castle?" Poppy further inquired.

"Live in a castle? *Me?* Of course. An' Mrs. Funnyduster, decidin' to stay there—in the

castle, I mean—me an' Davey we come alone."

"By way of Monticello, Indiana?" came the added crafty inquiry.

"Yep," nodded the old man. "That's whar Davey was laid up with lumbago. Had an awful time keepin' a poultice on him." Pausing, the speaker gave a queer throaty cackle. "An' seein' as heow you're lookin' fur information," he added dryly, kind of squinting at Poppy through narrowed eyes, "I don't mind tellin' you that it was in Monticello that I wrote that letter to the miller. Since then, though, my new hair has all come out. Don't know *why,* but it did. So I hurried over here as fast as I could to get a new supply of flour. . . . Is the old man millin' to-day?"

It takes a lot to floor Poppy.

"I don't see any life around the mill," says he.

"And now," says Sir Hinkle, when the raft touched the west shore, "s'pose you take this dollar bill an' go buy me a small sack of flour. Be sure it's fresh, fur I half suspect that the last calamity to my hair was due to stale flour. If thar's any change you're welcome to it."

Poppy and I jumped ashore.

"But why don't you come, too?" the leader inquired curiously.

"No," the old man slowly shook his head. "I'd ruther stay here. Or if I'm gone when you

git back with the flour," he added, "jest hang it in that thar willer tree out of the way of the bugs. I'll git it—you needn't worry about that."

We then started off in the direction of the mill, stopping at the first turn in the winding, weed-bordered shore path.

"Quick, Jerry!" says the leader excitedly. "Crawl back through the weeds and keep an eye on him. Don't let him get out of your sight."

"Do you think he's crazy?" says I uneasily.

"Crazy? Him? Oh, no!" Poppy gave a queer laugh. "Nor have we found out yet what his real object is in hanging around here. He says it's buckwheat flour. But I don't believe him. For why shouldn't he buy the flour himself if he needs it?"

"I was beginning to like him," says I, sort of scattered-like.

"Me, too. But he's a shrewd one, Jerry. For the instant I mentioned Monticello he knew that I was pumping him. So we better be on our guard when we're around him."

"And how about Davey Jones?" says I, in mounting uneasiness. "I'd feel cute to have him surprise me in the weeds and disfigure the ruffles in the seat of my pants."

"That turtle, Jerry," Poppy spoke thoughtfully, "is the queerest part of the mystery. It was brought here for a purpose. There can be

no doubt of that. And probably for an evil purpose, too."

"Oh, Poppy!" I shivered. "You shouldn't talk that way if you want me to go back. Gosh! I'm covered with goose pimples."

"What was that story of the old man's, Jerry? Did he say the turtle had killed a lot of seafaring men on an island, or something?"

The inside of my head was like a race track.

"Don't ask me," says I helplessly. "His story didn't make sense to me."

"Seafaring men!" Poppy spoke in a sort of hollow voice. "Old Amasa Gimp was a seafaring man. Don't you catch on, Jerry? This turtle, alive two hundred years ago, has something to do with the miller's early life."

Having thus separated himself from these clever deductions the leader went on, while I turned back. But the raft was gone! And so was the old man and his strange turtle.

Had we seen a ghost? I began to think so. For there was no place in the pond where the raft could have disappeared to so quickly unless it had sunk.

Golly Ned! I was scared out of my wits. And ready to believe now that we had seen the ghost of old Amasa Gimp himself I lit out for the mill lickety-cut.

The miller at one time had a wife and son.

But both are dead, as is also the son's wife. Barbara Gimp, the old man's only grandchild, keeps house for him. For three years she was in my class at school. That was before Poppy moved to town. Then she dropped out. She quit coming to Sunday school, too. Some of the mean Tutter girls turned up their noses at her, I guess, calling her "Grandpa's wildcat," which is the nickname that she has. With all of her temper, though, I like her better than those who snub her. One time she socked me on the bean with a croquet mallet. I think she's all right. And can she climb trees! Oh, baby! She's got me beat a mile.

Inasmuch as it was her great-grandfather's ghost that we had chaperoned across the mill pond, it suddenly occurred to me that she might like to hear about it. So instead of going straight to the mill I ran around to the back door of the stone cottage, not without hope, too, that I'd have the opportunity to thank her in my most gallant style for a choice piece of pie. But the kitchen and the rooms beyond it were a well of silence. "Bobs," I kind of hissed through the screen door. "Hey, Bobs, I've got something to tell you." But I got no answer.

And this, I looked around, was the house that old Amasa built! Amasa Gimp, the pirate, whose wicked past was tangled up seemingly with that

of a man-eating turtle! Br-r-r-r! A queer feeling suddenly stealing over me I got out of there in a hurry.

Poppy met me in the mill door.

"I thought I gave you a job," says he, kind of stiff-like.

"Yah," says I, "you would try and sick me onto a ghost."

"Ghost?" says he, searching my face. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing but a ghost, Poppy," I shivered, "could have disappeared the way he did."

The other, getting my story, looked me over sort of disgusted-like.

"And I told you to keep an eye on him! A swell detective, *you* are."

I began to feel kind of foolish.

"But if he wasn't a ghost," says I, "where did he disappear to?"

"Never mind," the leader generously dismissed the matter. "He's gone. So just forget about him. Anyway, we can pick up his trail when he comes back to the willow tree for his pancake flour."

Here the old miller himself, a quaint, likable figure in his baggy coat and shabby felt hat, came pottering into sight.

"I went to town to see my patent attorney," he told us, wiping his thin sweaty face, out of

which he looked at us with a pair of friendly brown eyes. I noticed, too, that his whole body was thin. That is why his clothes hung on him so baggy-like.

"And how did you come home?" Poppy inquired quickly. "By way of the bridge?"

"No. I came over the hill."

"Then you haven't seen your brother?"

"No."

"Did he tell you that he was going to tear down the bridge?"

"Tear it down?" says the old man, searching Poppy's face. "What do you mean?"

Then, having heard our story, a worried look spread over his wrinkled face.

"Sylvester never consults me about anything any more. He just goes ahead and does as he pleases. He should have helped me repair the bridge. For lately it's been going to pieces fast, having stood there so many years. I suppose, though, he figured it would be cheaper to tear it down."

"But isn't it true," says Poppy, "that you own half of the bridge?"

"Ye-es," the word was spoken slowly. "I own half of the water power, too; and following Father's death I bought out Sylvester's interest in the mill. But he complains if I even run the mill an hour or two a week. My wheel, he says,

wastes water. And he needs all the water in the pond for his own wheel."

Poppy seldom overlooks details.

"Have you got a deed to the mill?" he inquired.

"Yes," the old man nodded. "I ran across it the other day when I was cleaning out my desk."

"And you're sure," Poppy pressed, "that you put it away in some safe place where your brother isn't liable to find it?"

"Sylvester," the miller spoke in his gentle way, sort of looking at Poppy reprovingly with his big brown eyes, "isn't interested in the mill."

"Don't fool yourself," says Poppy. "He's interested in anything that can be turned into hard American cash. And I wouldn't put it past him to steal your deed and sell you out. For you say yourself that he hogs the whole water power. So how lovely for him if he owned both halves of it."

"He asked me a short time ago to sell out to him."

"What did he offer you?"

"A thousand dollars."

"A thousand dollars!" Poppy laughed scornfully. "My, he's a liberal guy. Do you know what my father says about your dam, Mr. Gimp? A business man himself, he values it at twenty

thousand dollars. Just twenty times as much as your brother offered you. So don't be in any hurry to sell. Besides, I have a hunch you're going to need it."

The old man's eyes lit up as he attached a meaning of his own to these words.

"Lawyer Van Ness," says he, "spoke very highly of my new hinge. So it may be, when I get my patent——"

But Poppy didn't intend to be sidetracked by hinges.

"As I told you the other day," he interrupted, "there's millions in this fancy pancake flour of yours, whether it cures bald heads or not. So why start up a hinge factory in competition with your brother—and you know very well, Mr. Gimp, how he'll fight you—when you already have a business that will earn a fortune for you?"

We had followed the pottering old miller into his cluttered workshop in the rear of the mill. And now we heard heavy footsteps approaching the door.

It was old Gimlet! And did his eyes ever blaze when he saw Poppy in the room.

"Pete," he addressed his brother, in that blustering, big-I-and-little-you way of his, "how much of this meddlesome youngster's story is true about you taking him into partnership?"

The miller's face was a blank.

"Why—" he began, looking first at Poppy and then at the newcomer. "I—I——"

"I was just telling your brother a few minutes ago," Poppy piped up, "about our pancake-promotion talk. And he seemed quite surprised to learn that I was going to help you run the mill."

Which left the old man more bewildered than ever.

"Dear me!" says he, running a trembling hand through his shaggy gray hair. "I—I don't——"

"Naturally you *don't* want him to tear down the bridge," Poppy swung in again. "That's exactly what I told him; my very words, in fact. The bridge was just as much ours, I said, as his. And I asked him to leave it alone, which he very kindly agreed to do. So now we're all set, Mr. Gimp. I'm going to help you in the mill, just as we agreed; and your brother, realizing that we'll need the bridge when our flour is ready to haul to market, will see to it that his end is put into good shape. As for our end, I'll take care of that. We can do a lot with a few planks and a handful of spikes. If it wasn't Sunday I'd do it to-morrow. As for the water power, we'll come to some kind of an amicable agreement regarding its equal division. Probably, when the

water is low, we'll run our plants alternate days, or something like that."

Old Gimlet's eyes were green balls.

"We'll do nothing of the sort," he exploded. And don't think that I'm exaggerating when I tell you that the very beams of the mill shook. "When the water is low I'll use it all. For I need it. Amicable agreement! Why, you gabby little brat, if you say another word to me about running my factory *alternate days,* I'll wring your confounded neck. As for you, Pete," he whirled on his visibly distressed brother, "you know *me.* I'm a man of iron. And I hold your destiny in the hollow of my hand. If you interfere with me in my business, or let this boy interfere with me, I'll crush you to the wall and take every cent you've got." Pausing, he cleared his throat for the balance of his speech. "If you act sensibly, though," he spoke in a less vicious voice, "and kick this youngster out . . . well, in that case it isn't improbable that I'll liberally finance Barbara's schooling, as was mentioned between us. Should we come to such an agreement, though, I'll ask you to sign over everything to me, the mill included."

"What?" squeaked Poppy, in a shrill voice. "Sign over *our* pancake mill, water power and all? Who do you think we are?—Santa Claus?"

The old miller held up a restraining hand.

"Please," he begged. "Don't—don't talk to him that way, Poppy. He means well. And he's my brother."

Old Gimlet jumped at that.

"Yes," says he, "and as brothers we always got along peaceably until this meddlesome boy showed up."

"Sure thing," says Poppy. "Until I came you always had everything your own way."

"Please," the miller again put out his trembling hand. "You mustn't talk to him that way, Poppy. Nothing is ever gained by quarreling. I'm naturally a peaceable man. I don't like to have people act this way in my presence. It upsets me. Possibly you better go home, Sylvester. I'll see that everything comes out all right. I know that you need the water power. And if I do start up a little factory of my own I may put in a gasoline engine."

"Factory?" old Gimlet quickly picked up the word. "What kind of a factory do you mean? Not hinges?"

"Of course not," Poppy showed that he still was able to use his voice. "Our business is pancakes."

"Yes," old Gimlet's eyes spit poison, "and your name will be Mudd if you don't shut up."

Poppy's face brightened.

"Well, well!" says he sort of beaming-like. "And to think that I never noticed it before."

"What?" snapped old Gimlet.

"That it's your lower jaw that moves when you talk."

Boy! That was a hot one. But I didn't laugh. I was afraid to.

Old blunderbuss moved heavily to the door. And when he spoke there was a noticeable change in his voice. It made me think of hunks of glinting steel.

"It's useless," says he, "talking to a fool." Then he turned to his brother. "I'll come over this evening, Pete, when you're alone. I have nothing more to say in the presence of this—this——"

"Meddlesome brat," Poppy supplied cheerfully.

But old Gimlet didn't say it. He just banged the door.

CHAPTER VI

POPPY MEETS THE GRANDDAUGHTER

THE miller, I saw, had no backbone at all. And if we hadn't been there to stick up for him I dare say he would have timidly turned over everything he had to his domineering brother. Possibly the grasping older brother figured that he would get everything when he came back that night. But I kind of had a hunch that he was due for a big surprise, with other possible surprises piled on top of it. For when old Poppy starts a thing he usually finishes it. And having started out to put Gimp's Fancy Mixture on the map, I couldn't conceive that he would let anything head him off, least of all a two-legged hog.

"I talked kind of big to him," he admitted, when the three of us were alone. "And I guess I was kind of sassy, too. But I did it for your good, Mr. Gimp."

"Oh, dear," sighed the disturbed old man, sinking weakly into a chair. "I fear that the end has come. For Sylvester never relents. Not that I have much here," he looked around the room

with brimming eyes. "But what little I have is dear to me. Father wanted me to keep the mill. So, as I say, I paid Sylvester out of my own pocket for his share of the property. It was with this money that he started up his hinge factory. Nor did I complain when an early invention of mine brought him riches. I wanted him to succeed. And how he can have the heart now to drive me out of here is more than I can comprehend. But that is what will happen, Poppy, if I further oppose him. You're a good boy. You've tried to help me. I fear, though, that you've done more harm than good."

"Gosh, Mr. Gimp," says Poppy, with shining eyes. "I haven't begun to help you yet. And you mustn't feel so discouraged. If you have a deed to the mill your brother can't take the property away from you. It's yours. So hang onto your valuable papers. And if your brother asks to see them tell him they aren't available. A good plan, *I* think, would be to turn them over to your lawyer."

"But my brother isn't a *thief,* Poppy," the old man again sought to reprove the younger one. "You mustn't talk that way about him. He wouldn't actually *steal* anything from me."

Poppy was silent. And it seemed to me as he bent over the trembling old man that his whole heart was in his kindly eyes.

"The other day when I was here, Mr. Gimp," he went on, "you told me how you hated the mill work. You were cut out for an inventor, you said. And I believe it, too. If you had no worries on your mind, and could thus give your complete thoughts to the chosen work, I believe you'd make a mark for yourself. But if you're going to do that you've certainly got to have somebody run the mill. So why not give me the job?"

"But—but I have no money, Poppy," the old man spoke sort of distressed-like. "I couldn't pay you."

"I'm not worrying about the money, Mr. Gimp. I want to help you. That's the big idea in my mind. Of course, what I don't know about milling would fill a book. But I pick up things quickly. And once you tell me how to do a thing you won't have to tell me a second time. . . . Can I start in next Monday afternoon after school?" the request was made eagerly.

"But what will we do?" the old man spoke helplessly.

"Manufacture buckwheat flour, of course."

"Whether Sylvester approves of it or not?"

"What we do in this mill," says Poppy, with a sort of proprietory flourish of his hand, "is none of Sylvester's business."

"But he controls the water power. And if we start our wheel he probably will order us to stop

it. Besides, there's no market for my flour. So why manufacture it? It'll just be a drag on my hands."

"You needn't worry about the selling end, Mr. Gimp. Jerry and I will take care of that. Nor need you worry about your brother butting in on us if you hang onto your mill and water power deed. Oh, he'll rave, of course. But if you'll let me do the talking I'll guarantee you that he won't impose on us."

A wistful look came into the old man's eyes.

"And you really think, Poppy, that you can build up a demand for my flour?"

"You don't seem to realize, Mr. Gimp, what a wonderful mixture you have. Gimp's pancakes! Um-yum-yum! You should hear my father brag on your flour. He absolutely won't look at an ordinary pancake. Give me Gimp's, says he, like Patrick Henry, or give me death. And I'm just as crazy over them as he is. Your father did a big business. And so did you years ago. But times have changed. And no matter how good a product is housewives to-day turn it down if it isn't put up attractively. Plain paper bags were all right thirty years ago. And probably we still can use bags in connection with our local business. But if we're going to do business all over the state —and I'd like to have you tell me why we can't— we've got to put the flour up attractively. Then

merchants will be glad to handle it. And once people have gotten a taste of it they'll come back for more. Maybe, too, we'll have to find a snappier name for it. Something zippy and clever. However, we'll talk about that later on when we're thoroughly organized. The thing to do now is to sell as much flour as we can under the old name. In other words *let's get started.* Could I have my first milling lesson this afternoon?"

That's Poppy, for you. Things can't move fast enough to suit him. *Pep?* Say, he's jammed full of it. It hangs out of his ears in big gobs. And he's full of corking good ideas, too. As for courage, if you turned that kid loose in a cage of man-eating wildcats, he'd soon have them looking like a bunch of clipped toothbrushes.

Watching the old man's expressive face, I was struck by the sudden change that came over him. The helplessness and timidity that had oppressed him seemed to melt away. And when he arose to his feet he was the picture of determination.

"Your eagerness to help me," says he, in a steady voice, "has brought home to me the fact that of late I have done very little to help myself. But from now on things are going to be different. I'm going to do my work, and let my inventions wait. I'm going to grind every kernel of buck-

wheat that I have in the bins. And if you want this flour put up in fancy cartons, go ahead and order them. If necessary I'll mortgage the mill to pay the bill. This is my last chance. I realize that. And I'm grateful to you for your help. Either we win or we lose. And for Barbara's sake I hope we win."

Poppy, of course, was tickled pink. And you should have heard the big lingo that he dished out to us. Not only were we facing the opportunity of a lifetime, he said, but it was our *duty* to spread the gospel (that's exactly what he called it) of Gimp's Fancy Mixture into every home in the country. For the homes using Gimp's Fancy Mixture, he orated, would be happier homes. Gimp's for happiness! Gimp's for domestic bliss! Many a well-meaning husband, he said, crawled out of bed with a grouch on. But all this would be changed. Gimp's would work the miracle. For what husband could remain grouchy with a plate of Gimp's piping hot pancakes in front of him—pancakes dripping with rich country butter made from contented cows and smothered with pure Vermont maple syrup—meaning the pancakes, of course, and not the cows. Gosh! I guess he would have been raving yet if a bug hadn't mistaken his mouth for the new entrance to the Mammoth Cave, or something.

Having pumped a fresh supply of air into his lungs, he fished a crumpled dollar bill out of his pocket.

"Would it surprise you," he spoke to the miller, "to learn that this money was given to me by the old geezer who wrote you that crazy pancake letter?"

"Then he's in town?" says the miller, surprised.

"Even more exciting," says Poppy, "he's hiding in the willow patch behind your mill."

"Hiding?" the miller repeated the word. "What do you mean?"

"There's something queer about him, Mr. Gimp. Jerry and I haven't been able to figure it out yet. And while I don't want to needlessly frighten you, it will pay you, I think, to keep your doors and windows locked."

"Maybe I better notify the marshal," the miller spoke uneasily.

"Please don't, Mr. Gimp," Poppy held out a restraining hand. "For Jerry and I want to work on the mystery ourselves. Nor need you feel afraid. For all you have to do is to say the word and we'll stand guard here until the mystery is solved."

Struck by a humorous thought, the miller gave a nervous laugh.

"But what if the man is telling us the truth?"

"In that case," says Poppy, "our fortunes are made. For every bald-headed man in the country will patronize us. Even better than that, they'll shower blessings on us."

"Gimp's Fancy Mixture!" I laughed. "It grows fat on the inside and hair on the outside."

"*Good* night!" Poppy matched my laugh with one of his own. "Don't get that tangled up and give people the impression that Gimp's grows hair on the inside. For that would ruin us."

The leader, I saw, was anxious to quiz the miller about his father. Which was kind of delicate stuff. Finally, though, he got the conversation twisted around to his liking.

"No," the miller shook his head. "I never heard my father say anything about a turtle. He probably visited the tropics. I don't doubt that in the least. For the stories that the neighbors tell about him aren't exaggerated. He led a hard life in his youth. To that point, though, none of us are perfect. And youth is a fruitful time for errors. My father, I know, was ashamed of his early misdeeds. He tried to keep his past buried, not so much for secrecy but out of shame, as I say. So, even if he had peculiarly come in contact with a turtle, or even had visited this island that you mention, the chances are he wouldn't have said anything about it to me."

"It may be a crazy theory," Poppy spoke re-

flectively, "but I still believe that the turtle and its queer owner are mixed up in some way with your father's early life. And it is to uncover certain long-hidden secrets of his—secrets that you know nothing about—that the turtle was brought here. The old man's talk about his bald head, and how he expects to grow a third crop of hair, is nothing more than a flimsy blind. So you can see the wisdom of keeping your windows locked."

The miller moved uneasily to the door.

"Barbara and I think nothing of leaving the cottage unlocked," says he. "But maybe I had better run over there and see that everything is safe."

"And who's Barbara?" Poppy inquired, when we were alone.

I stared at him.

"For the love of mud," says I. "Haven't you met *her?*"

"No," he shook his head.

"But I thought you were a regular visitor out here."

"I didn't say so. In fact, I never saw the inside of this place till last Thursday."

I saw a chance to have some fun.

"There's a partner for you, Poppy," I laughed, referring to the coming birthday party.

"But who is she?" he pressed curiously.

"The old man's granddaughter. As pretty as

a picture," I spread it on. "And *dressy?* Say, she's the last word in style. Silks and satins galore. She even wears ruffles on her stockings. If you were to take her to the party the other boys would turn green with envy."

I shouldn't have said it. For it's no credit to a boy to poke fun at a girl behind her back. If Barbara's dresses were queer it was because she was too poor to buy better ones. I knew that. As for being beautiful, she had a pug nose and freckles, which, though, was no fault of hers.

Yes, I quickly saw where I had done wrong. And I started to tell Poppy the truth, wanting him to know what a swell kid Bobs really was, even though she didn't have silk dresses and pretty pink cheeks. But I stopped, and my tongue went dead in my mouth, when I caught sight of her standing in the doorway.

She had heard every word I said!

I can't begin to describe the look on her flushed face. It was more than anger. There was a glint in her eyes that sizzled and chilled me at the same time.

"And I always thought that *you* were a sincere friend," says she scornfully. "But you're like all the rest. You think it's smart to laugh at me. Oh," she gestured, speaking hotly, "don't try to deny it. For *I* know. It was partly the smart talk of boys like you—boys from supposedly good

homes—that drove me out of school. For no girl, even if she is ugly, likes to be made fun of. I had to wear old clothes to school because, if you must know the truth, we're poorer than Job's turkey. And because I couldn't dress as well as the other scholars you made fun of me. You laughed at me behind my back. The girls were even meaner. Did you ever see *me* at a party? No, you didn't. For I never was invited. I wouldn't have gone anyway for I had nothing to wear. And in town this afternoon three of the girls I knew when I went to school had the impudence to stop me in the post office and inquire, in that *swee-et* way of theirs, if any of the boys had asked me to go to Marjorie Van Ness' birthday party." Here she turned and faced Poppy. "Everything that he told you about me is a lie. I'm not pretty, I'm just the opposite. I'm gawky and ugly and clumsy. And what's more I never had a silk dress in all my life. Silk!" She spoke the word with a harsh laugh. "I'm lucky to get gingham. And every stitch that I have I make myself. Look at my hands! *Calloused.* I've had to plant corn for a neighboring farmer to keep food in the house. That's how poor we are." Then she flew at me again. "You're like all the rest. Sometimes I think I hate everybody, even poor old Granddad. And maybe," a sob came into her throat, "he thinks I *do* hate him,

the way I keep nagging at him to go to work."

"Bobs!" I cried. And I don't mind telling you that I had tears in my eyes. Oh, how I despised myself for what I had said. Yet I wasn't half as bad as she thought I was. I really liked her. "Forgive me, Bobs," I begged. "I didn't mean it."

"I'll never forgive you," she cried hotly. "And what's more I never want to speak to you again. No, never. I heard that you were here this afternoon. Your mother told me. And I hurried home, thinking that I'd make some candy for you —make it of sugar that I earned myself planting corn. Yes, I actually *ran* to get here. And then I heard how *beau-tiful* I was and how *dressy*. . . . Oh, I could scratch your eyes out."

"You shouldn't razz him that way," Poppy spoke up in my defense. "For he's a good kid. He didn't mean any harm."

"Of course," she tossed her head in continued scornfulness, "you *would* stick up for him. Who are you anyway?" she demanded fiercely. "And what are you doing here?"

"My name is Poppy Ott. And I'm a friend of your grandfather's."

"I'm sorry, Bobs," I put in again. "Gee, you can't imagine how ashamed I am."

But she wouldn't even look at me.

"Well," she demanded rudely of Poppy, "what are you waiting for? Why don't you go? Aren't

you afraid to stay in the same room with a *wild-cat?* Of course, some wildcats are *beau-tiful* and *dressy*. But they're wildcats just the same. And they might scratch your eyes out."

"I always did like wildcats," grinned Poppy, determined, I guess, to make the best of the situation. "And I always admired girls with spunk, too. So let's shake hands and be friends."

"Never," she thrust her hands behind her.

"I think you should," he went on earnestly. "For we'll probably see a lot of each other from now on."

Her eyes quickened.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"I'm going to be your grandfather's partner. He and I are going to run the mill together."

She hadn't expected that. And for several moments she seemed at a loss for words.

"I suppose," she finally found her voice, "that you think you've said something funny."

"Not at all," says Poppy cheerfully. And then, sort of figuring, I guess, that the more he said the less she'd be able to say, which was an advantage, he started off on some more of his big talk, mixing up lithographed flour cartons with grouchy husbands and ending up with a bank balance of seventeen million dollars. Talk about Tennyson's brook running on forever! Boy, that

brook was a muscle-bound snail as compared with him.

But he dried up in short order (and did he ever look silly) when Bobs, after a final scornful glance at him, rolled up her pug nose and left the room.

CHAPTER VII

ON GUARD

"Br-r-r-r!" I shivered, when we were alone. "And thus the Tutter Consolidated Pancake and Hair-Restorer Company suffers a sudden and severe chill."

Poppy shrugged.

"We can't expect to have them all eating out of our hands," says he.

"And you never saw her before?" I quizzed.

"No," he shook his head.

"She's a swell kid, Poppy. And was I ever an egg to make fun of her behind her back! I don't know what possessed me to do it. I wanted to be funny, I guess. But I've had my lesson. Never again for me, kid. Nor will I feel right until I have squared myself with her."

"Oh, she'll be all right the next time you see her," he passed the matter over. "For everybody knows that you're a good kid. And we all make mistakes. It sure stunned her, though," he laughed, "when I told her that I was going to be a member of the family."

"That gab of yours," I told him, "would stun anybody. Where do you get it, anyway?"

"Didn't you know," he grinned, springing an old gag, "that I was vaccinated with a talking-machine needle?"

It was now well along in the afternoon. So we recovered our unused fishing poles and started for home, stopping at the corner of Elm and Main Streets when we caught sight of Red and Rory perched on hitching posts on opposite sides of the latter's drive trying to outdo each other in a banana-eating contest.

"Crickets!" Poppy suddenly clutched my arm, as his memory came to life. "We forgot all about the old turtle-geezer's pancake flour."

"Call him Sir Hinkle," says I. "It's easier."

Red's ears were full of banana juice.

"Who's got a wrinkle?" he gurgled.

Told then that a new mystery had sprung up, and that we were going to stand guard that night at the old pancake mill, he signaled to Rory for time out.

" 'Ow many now?" Rory wanted to know.

"Sixteen," says Red, letting out his belt.

"You win," says Rory, jumping down. "All Hi hate was 'leven."

"Yah," says Poppy, "and if we don't have to bury the two of you behind the mill to-night I miss my guess."

"Bananas are too heavy for some people's stomachs," says Red, with a kind of careless gesture. "But I could live on 'em."

"I'd hate to pay the bill," says I, squinting at the pile of banana skins at the foot of the post.

Called to the telephone when I got home I was surprised to hear Bobs' voice.

"I'm sorry, Jerry, for the way I talked to you. I shouldn't have done it. But my temper got away from me. It seemed to me as though the whole world was against me. But I feel different now. For Granddad and I have had a long talk. And like him I'm convinced that there's better things in store for us. So forgive me, Jerry. And tell the other boy how grateful I am to him."

Say! Maybe you think I wasn't happy.

"You're a brick, Bobs," I cried. "Gee! You're the peachiest girl in the whole world. And I guess you know that I mean it, too."

"You sound convincing," she laughed.

"That speech of mine," I told her regretfully, referring to my afternoon's disgrace, "was the dumbest thing I ever pulled."

"Everything," says she, "is forgiven and forgotten so far as I am concerned."

"Say, Bobs," I spoke eagerly.

"Yes?"

"You know what you said this afternoon about making candy for me."

"Sure thing."

"Well, would you mind if I brought you out a box of candy to-night? I'd like to do it to sort of square myself."

"Anything but licorice," she laughed. "For I hate licorice."

So, after supper, I hurried down to the candy store where I separated myself from a two-dollar bill. And, bu-lieve me, I never bought anything in all my life (even though it took every cent I had) that gave me more real pleasure. When Red heard about it, though, he started to razz me, yipping out a lot of truck about me being in love. So I took him down and squeezed the bananas out of his stomach into the top part of his throat.

Later the six of us (Poppy, Peg, Scoop, Red, Rory and myself) armed ourselves with stout clubs and set out for the old mill, which, when we got there, was hemmed in by creeping shadows. The hinge factory, of course, had been closed for the week, the weary workmen having dragged themselves home at six o'clock. But though the big power wheel was silent we could hear the trickle of escaping water. It seemed to be down in a dark pit. Trickle! trickle! trickle! There was something sort of eerie about the sound. And I had the added uneasy feeling, as we approached the bridge, that the rambling

building behind us was following us with hidden lowering eyes. Like its owner it hated us. It was a part of him and he was a part of it. In the heads of both were evil grasping schemes. All imagination, of course. But, even so, it was a sort of premonition. And I guess you know what *that* is.

Though partly wrecked on the hinge-factory side, the bridge was still passable. So, picking our steps, we hurried across, stopping in the bushes on the west bank for final counsel.

"Here's the dope, gang," says Poppy sketchily. "Last Thursday, when I called to see old Mr. Gimp, the miller—he's an inventor, you know—he showed me a crazy letter that he had just received from a man in Monticello, Indiana. Reading this unusual letter I had a good laugh. For the man who wrote it claimed that he had grown a crop of new hair on his bald head by the application of cold pancakes made from Gimp's Fancy Mixture. I didn't believe that. But I knew what peachy pancakes the flour made. The best I ever ate. So, thinking highly of the flour, it puzzled me to understand why everything looked so dead around the mill. But I soon found out. The miller, though as nice a man as anybody could hope to meet, is thirty years behind the times in his marketing methods. Ginks! I thought of the fun I could have helping him build

up his business. And I figured, after studying the situation, that he needed the money. But how was I going to let him know that I wanted to help him? Then, this morning, as you know, we bumped into the old geezer with the pancake on his bald head. Say, you could have knocked me over with a feather. For right away, of course, I thought of the pancake letter. Could it be, I wondered, as all kinds of crazy thoughts jumped through my head, that there was truth in the letter writer's claims? Was this another bald-headed man who was taking the 'pancake' cure? Anyway, I concluded, I ought to tell the miller that there was an old man in town with a pancake on his bald head. So, lugging our fishing poles, Jerry and I meandered out here this afternoon. And what do you know if Jerry didn't fall over the old pancake geezer in the weeds. He was feeding hunks of raw liver to a huge turtle. Later the turtle towed the three of us across the mill pond on a raft. And then the old geezer and his strange pet disappeared. Nor have we seen them since.

"Other things happened, too," Poppy continued. "First we got in bad with old Gimlet. Then we clashed with his smart grandson. As a result we've taken sides with the miller. And, with his consent, we're going to see if we can't help him build up his business. But that has

nothing to do with our work to-night. We're detectives now, not millers. And the guy we're laying for is old Sir Hinkle himself."

"Who?" squawked Rory, with eyes as big as teacups. "Sir 'Inkle? You don't mean Sir 'Inkle Funnyduster, do you?"

"No one else but," says Poppy. "And that is the queerest part of all. For reasons unknown to us the old geezer—he later admitted to us that he was the man who wrote the crazy letter—was hiding in Red's barn. He overheard us talking about a 'turtle' card when the game was on. And having a turtle of his own—gosh, fellows, it's the biggest turtle you ever set eyes on—he was attracted to the cards when we left the barn. Then, I think, is when he decided to let on to us, in case we surprised him, that he was old Sir Hinkle himself. And to remember the odd name he pocketed the card, which explains its disappearance. Then you know what happened to him in the alley. He told Jerry and I that he had come to town to buy some more buckwheat flour, for it's his story that the other crop of new hair, brought out by pancake applications, fell out. But we think he's scheming to secretly lift something out of the mill—something long hidden there that connects up with old Amasa Gimp's pirate days. The turtle, you must remember, is hundreds of years old. It probably was a big turtle in the

pirate's younger days. There was mention of an island, too—Boot Island, the old geezer called it. Pirate stuff, right down to the last letter, if you were to ask me. Boy, I hope there *is* a gob of pirate treasure tucked away in the old mill. And if Davey Jones—that's the turtle's name—is the key to the treasure, I sure hope he leads old Sir Hinkle to it. After which, of course, we'll do our little trick and save the treasure for its rightful owners, meaning the old miller and his granddaughter."

Red let out a six-cylinder squeal.

"Gee-miny crickets gosh!" says he. "It sounds like a fairy tale. And what do you say if we capture the turtle and make soup out of him? For I like turtle soup. One time when we were camping—that was the time you found the mole in the bottom of the coffee pot, Jerry—I ate a gallon of it. Don't you remember? Um-yum-yum!"

"You want to be mighty careful," cautioned Poppy, "that the turtle doesn't make soup of you."

"Is he cross?" says Red.

"Well," says Poppy, "I wouldn't advise you to try rubbing noses with him."

"He'd get blamed poor picking," put in Peg, who, as you can imagine, like the others, had been drinking in every word of the exciting story, "if he bit off Red's nose."

"Anyway," laughed Scoop, "the freckles might taste good."

"And now," says Poppy, "let's divide forces. Jerry, you and I and Rory will guard the cottage. The rest can surround the mill. Try and keep in touch with each other. And if you find yourself in a fix, yell 'thirteen' as loud as you can."

"Boy," says Red, strutting around, "this is the life. The more of this detective stuff I lap up the better I like it."

"Quit patting yourself on the back," grunted Peg, "and get to work."

"Where do you want me to go?"

"Take the north side of the mill."

Red let out his neck.

"Gosh!" says he. "It's awful dark over there. You take the north side, Scoop."

"Do as you're told," ordered Peg. "And snap into it, too."

"Well, good-by, fellows," Red then made his voice sound kind of quavering-like. "If the worst comes to the worst, remember that I like cheese just as well as calla lilies. Have you still got it, Jerry?"

"What?" says I.

"The box of candy."

"Sure thing," I told him heartlessly. "But it won't do you any good."

"Oh, oh!" he suffered. "To think that I have to meet my fate on an empty stomach."

The big monkey!

"Sixteen bananas," grunted Peg, "with a big supper on top of it. Yah, your stomach *must* be empty."

"That's all right," waggled Red. "Razz me all you want to about my appetite. But it's a cinch I'm not going to be like my Aunt Lucy."

"Don't tell me," says Peg, "that *she's* cuckoo, too."

"If she licks the salt off a cracker she thinks she's had a hearty meal. And she's so thin she has to drink muddy water to keep people from seeing through her."

"Bu-lieve me," laughed Peg, "if anybody could see through you they'd get an eyeful."

"They wouldn't see much," contributed Scoop, "if they looked through his head."

"Tra-la-la." Red stepped around. "If you guys are trying to insult me you might just as well save your breath. For I've been insulted by a general."

"General Debility, I suppose," says Peg.

"No," laughed Red, "it was General Nuisance."

We separated then. And when Bobs came to the back door, in answer to my knock, I handed her my peace offering.

"Won't you come in," she invited.

"No," I told her.

"And why not?"

"I have to stand guard."

Told then that we were guarding the cottage and mill, and why, her eyes glowed.

"And you really think there's treasure hidden here?"

"They say there's fire where there's smoke," says I. "So why shouldn't there be hidden treasure where there's a pirate? Anyway, that's our theory."

"How thrilling!" she cried, clapping her hands. "Can't I join you? Please. For I'd love to be a detective."

"That's a man's job," says I, with a touch of dignity.

"I've often wondered," she then spoke more reflective-like, "if the stories that the neighbors tell about my great-grandfather really are true."

"Your grandfather says they are," I waggled.

"In that case," says she, "it wouldn't be a bit surprising if something queer did happen here tonight. For pirates usually leave strange hidden secrets behind them. I hope, though, that my great-grandfather wasn't a murderer as well as a robber."

Here the old miller himself pottered into sight.

"I'm taking care of my papers as your chum

advised," he smiled at me. "Barbara has agreed to hide them in the cupboard. And next Monday I'll see about putting them in the bank. Not," he added loyally, "that I distrust my brother Sylvester. No, indeed. But others might not be as honest."

Stooped and thin faced, with his gray hair standing up untidily all over his head, he looked more quaint and likeable than ever. A swell old man, all right. And deserving, I told myself, of all that we could possibly do for him.

Passing the door, Poppy gave a sharp cough, a gentle hint, I took it, for me to cut short my Romeo and Juliet act. So I left Bobs and her grandfather alone. And the door having been closed behind me I fell to pacing up and down in the dark.

And *was* it dark! Oh, baby!

CHAPTER VIII

GETTING CLOSE TO THE MYSTERY

I HAD the northeast corner of the stone cottage, quaint old-fashioned structure that it was with its steep-pitched roof and high narrow windows. Poppy had the northwest corner. And Rory was around in front, among the lilac bushes, on the south side.

We all had clubs, as I say. Mine was a broom handle. Not a skinny, undersized handle, either, but a nice big plump one. It just fit my mitt. And as I took a sort of strangling grip on it, after stumbling over a pile of old tin cans in the back yard, I told myself that it would be an unlucky day (or night) for old Sir Hinkle, man of mystery that he was and now undoubtedly mixed up in some crooked work, if I landed on him.

Was he a pirate, himself? I wondered. And I wondered, too, as I separated my left foot from a gooey old paint pail, if we really had the right dope on him. Hidden pirate treasure! It was an exciting thought. Still, we hadn't the slightest proof that such a treasure had been hidden here.

We never had heard of it. It wasn't to be doubted, though, that old Sir Hinkle, the world's champion turtle trainer, had come here for *something*. So it *could* be treasure.

I was pretty sure now, as I turned the matter over in my mind, that it *was* treasure. And was I ever excited! Oh, baby! But where did the turtle come in? That was the queer part. Could it be possible, I further quizzed myself, that the treasure was hidden in some place that only a turtle could reach? Maybe, came the added exciting thought, as my imagination got into full sway, there were under-water passageways in the thick stone walls of the old mill as built by the pirate himself. And the turtle was expected to go in and out of these hidden passageways, lifting the treasure piece by piece from its watery hiding place and dropping it at its master's feet.

Well, if that was the case, I sort of figured things out, looking to my own safety, the thing for us to do was to sock old Sir Hinkle on the beezer when the turtle was making its last trip to the treasure's hiding place. Then we could scoot, taking the recovered treasure with us, later turning it over to its rightful owners. Old Davey, of course, losing out after all of his hard work, would spit green blood. But we should worry about that if we once got safely away. On the other hand, I could imagine how we'd fall over

each other in a sweating panic if he bobbed out of the water, with the last piece of eight in his mouth, while we were loading up. Gosh! I wasn't a bit scared of old Sir Hinkle. For he was half goofy, anyway. The crazy nut! He and his pancakes! But, take it from me, I hadn't the slightest desire to get tossed around by his four-legged bodyguard. I guess not! Legs and arms don't grow on a fellow like new warts on a healthy squash. When a leg is gone it's gone for good. And I could readily conceive what would happen to me, my seat-a-ma-ritis included, if old Davey got a crack at me with his high-powered molars. For he had a mouth as big as a garbage can.

As I say, it was darker than a stack of black cats. Boy, *was* it dark! And if I hadn't known that my chums were a few yards away I think I would have had a goose-pimple chill. For an adventure like that puts a fellow's nerves on edge. I'd feel a whole lot safer, I told myself, wanting to get as much comfort out of the situation as possible, when old Sir Hinkle showed up. For then we would know exactly where he was. It was the uncertainty, you see, regarding his possible whereabouts, that made the situation risky.

And there was old Davey! *He* might be within two feet of me for all I knew to the contrary. I thought again of his big mouth and ogre-like teeth. I thought, too, of the way he

had lit into Silly Gimp. Gosh! Stopping in my tracks, my heart pounding like a loose-jointed Ford, I tried to pierce the surrounding darkness. But I couldn't see a thing. Nor could I hear a thing except the night life in the adjacent mill pond.

There was a light in the cottage. And as I paused at the kitchen window I saw Bobs and her grandfather putting something away in the top part of a tall old-fashioned cupboard. Probably the miller's deeds and other valuable papers. Bobs laughed as she sort of teetered on a chair. Stooping, she gayly kissed the old man on his wrinkled forehead. Then, as she jumped down, he put his arm around her sort of gentle-like and they passed into the sitting room in the front part of the house, taking the kerosene lamp with them.

What a contrast, I thought, between the miller and his grasping, miserly brother. And I wondered, as I stood there in the darkness, if old Gimlet had always been a two-legged skunk or whether money had made him that way. Money is all right. Without it a fellow doesn't get very far. To eat, one needs money. And to wear clothes, one needs money. But it's all wrong to worship money as old Gimlet did. All he could think of was grabbing the dollars and salting them away. To add to his hoard he was ready to neglect his workmen and even skin his own

brother. While the latter, on the other hand, though as poor as a church mouse, was one of the most likeable of men. In a way he was richer than his wealthy relative. For the neighbors liked and respected him. Nor did he have a lot of sour stuff in his heart. To my notion, the right kind of a rich man is not one who hoards his money or spends it on himself, but one who helps the Boy Scouts and the churches and the poor people near him. As for old Gimlet, do you suppose *he* ever coughed up a penny for the Boy Scouts? Not so you could notice it. I happen to know, for I was on the committee the time we were raising money to build a new shelter house in our camp. The Boy Scout movement, old tightwad told me, was folderol. And he slammed the office door in my face. That's the kind of an old buzzard he is. So don't let it surprise you that he was now scheming to skin his own brother. That was stuff to his liking. For he was as mean as he was miserly. He actually liked to make people unhappy. And while young Silly is a skunk after his own fashion, it's only fair to him to say that he probably would have been a much better kid if he hadn't been brought up, an orphan, in his grandfather's house.

The frogs, I guess, of which there were thousands in the big mill pond, didn't like the intense darkness. For they dished out the most dismal

croaks imaginable, probably to let each other know how they felt about it. There were other night sounds, too. Crickets, I guess. And occasionally a snoopy old owl chipped in its eerie bazzoo. Nice mournful stuff! It gave me the creeps. And strangely I thought of the night in the old Scotch cemetery when I touched that *thing* in the dark, as written down in my *Stuttering Parrot* story. Only don't get the idea that the thing I touched had parrot feathers on it. I guess not! If you must know the whole shivery truth it was something *cold* and *clammy* like a dead man's face.

Beautiful thoughts, truly, for a dark night!

Then, shortly after nine thirty, we heard heavy footsteps on the bridge. It was old Gimlet. And, can you imagine it, rich man that he was, he carried a kerosene lantern, unwilling, I guess, to wear out the batteries of his flashlight.

The cottage was enclosed by a stone fence. And passing through the sagging front gate, which creaked dismally on its rusted hinges, the burly newcomer moved briskly up the flower-bordered path to the front door, where, before knocking, he very economically lowered the wick of his old lantern. *Him* waste oil? Hardly. It wasn't his nature to waste anything, not even kindness.

"Um . . ." he grunted characteristically, when

his stoop-shouldered brother came uneasily to the door. "Good evening, Pete. Almost lost my way once, it's so blamed dark. And, of course, that young grandson of mine had the car just when I needed it. I sometimes think I ought to put him to work in the factory and let him earn some of the money he spends on tires and gas. That would teach him the value of money."

Silly work in a factory! That was a big joke. Nor did old Gimlet mean what he said, either. For he seemed to like to provide his smart-acting grandson with expensive truck so that he could lord it over the other kids. The crafty old man, I figured, was talking that way for a purpose.

It was a hot night. And having hoofed it all the way from town, a mile away, old Gimlet seated himself as comfortably as possible near the open door, the better to expose his sweating carcass to the evening breezes. So it was easy for us to follow his gab. There was an open window on my side, too, and, bu-lieve me, I got as close to it as I could, Poppy later joining me.

The conversation in the cottage was nice and polite at first, old Gimlet figuring, I guess, crafty old geezer that he was, that Abraham Lincoln knew his stuff when he said that honey was a better fly catcher than vinegar.

"And how are you, Barbara?" came the smooth inquiry.

"Quite well, Uncle Sylvester," Bobs replied quietly.

"Um . . ." the catty green eyes looked her over. "You certainly have shot up during the past year. Almost as tall as your grandpa. And fully as strong, I dare say. . . . Been giving any further thought to your education?"

Bobs shook her head.

"No," she spoke in the same quiet voice.

"Last December your grandpa asked me if I'd lend him the necessary money to put you through school. And when I asked him why you didn't go to school in Tutter, he said you didn't like it there. You wanted to go away to school, he said. We had a long talk about it. And I told him that I'd put up the necessary money if he'd relinquish his rights to the water power as left to us jointly. Which he declined to do. So I got stubborn, too. And the result is that nothing was accomplished."

"I wouldn't want you to think," Bobs spoke with a red face, proud kid that she is, "that *I* asked Granddad to go to you for money. He did it of his own accord. I knew nothing about it till afterwards."

"I—I was worried about you, Barbara," the old miller felt called upon to defend himself. "It wasn't right, I told myself, that you should grow up without an education. You should be in school

like the other girls of your age. And when you refused to attend school in town, I almost *had* to go to your uncle for aid. You understand, don't you, Barbara? And you, too, Sylvester?" the voice broke off sort of pleading-like.

"Yes, indeed," old Gimlet cut Bobs off. "I understand perfectly. And I'm glad to say that I'm in a mood now to see the thing through." He turned to Bobs. "Your education, I figure, including your clothes—and I'm going to see to it that you have just as nice clothes as any girl in this town—will cost me not less than twelve thousand dollars. For you'll be in school several years. It may even run as high as fifteen thousand dollars. But what of that?" he gave a sort of magnanimous gesture. "I want you to have an education, Barbara. A *good* education, music included. And I'm willing to pay the bills."

Bobs' eyes reminded me of twin stars.

"I do want to go to school, Uncle Sylvester," she spoke emotionally. "It's the big dream of my life. I want to be like other girls. I want to have nice clothes. And I want to have the boys admire me instead of poking fun at me behind my back. I've been *dowdy* all my life. We're so poor I had to be. But I'll never take a penny of your money," she concluded spiritedly, "if it means that Granddad has got to give up his mill."

"And who wants him to give up the mill?" old Gimlet's voice was all honey and cream. "Certainly not *me*. All I want is the water power."

"But you told me, Sylvester," the miller spoke for himself, "that I'd have to sign over the mill to you."

"Yes," the hinge manufacturer gave a thoughtful nod. "That's exactly what I said. For I don't believe that you can legally separate the mill and your interest in the water power. The two go together. So, to play safe, and have everything satisfactory to both of us and our later heirs, I thought I'd have you turn over the property to me. I'd then end these water power arguments, for the whole dam would be mine. And having no use for the mill or this cottage, what more natural than that I should ask you to stay here, rent free, to care for the property? You can see where I stand, Pete. We're brothers, of course. But we've got to be businesslike. Take this paper and read it, Barbara. There's nothing formal about it. It's simply a businesslike agreement between brothers who have each other's interests at heart. Your grandpa knows I need the whole water power. And I'm willing to pay for it, figuring, too, that in putting you through school—which, as I say, is going to cost me upwards of twelve thousand dollars, a fortune in itself—that I'm doing my duty by you as your

uncle. Moreover, I'll give your grandpa a nice easy job in my factory, at good wages, and pay him one thousand dollars in cash, which is the amount that I once offered him for the mill and its associated power rights. Isn't that the way the agreement reads?"

Bobs ran her sharp eyes through the typewritten paper.

"Yes," she nodded.

"Then let's have your signature," the visitor turned briskly to his faltering brother, "and we'll call the deal closed. I've already made out your check. See?" he took a fat check book from his inside coat pocket.

Bobs jumped to her feet.

"No," she cried returning the paper. "Granddad isn't going to sign anything that takes away his rights to the mill. You say you want to help me. You say it's your duty to send me to school. But you can't be sincere or you wouldn't ask him to sign away everything he has."

Old Gimlet began to lose patience.

"But, as I explained to you, this agreement is a mere formality."

"You must think it's necessary," says Bobs, "or you wouldn't insist on it. You've always used more than your share of the water power. Lately you've used it all. But we never complained. We don't intend to complain. If you must know

the truth, though, I've often thought that you might have paid Granddad something for using his share. For it put money into your pocket. But the suggestion would never have come from us. So why can't you let things go on as they are? Why do you ask Granddad to give up all of his rights here?"

Old Gimlet's eyes had a mean look.

"I'm going to take no chances," says he viciously, "of that blamed Ott kid interfering with my business. And I'd like to know further why you picked him up."

Bobs smiled.

"We didn't," says she. "He picked us up."

"The meddler!"

"I like him," says Bobs simply. "And so does Granddad."

Old Gimlet turned angrily on his quavering brother.

"Once and for all," says he, "will you sign this paper or won't you?"

"No," Bobs again spoke for her distressed grandparent. "There will be no papers signed in this house to-night."

"I wasn't talking to you," the visitor snapped.

"Possibly not," says Bobs quietly. "But I'm talking to *you*. And I'm trying not to be sassy. For Granddad wouldn't like that. We don't want to have any trouble with you. We simply ask you

to stay on your side of the creek and we'll stay on ours."

Old Gimlet pulled in his horns. And when he spoke his voice was so sweet that it fairly dripped honey.

"Listen, Barbara. You're not taking a sensible view of this matter at all. You must think of yourself, my child. And what is more important than your education? I've always said you *would* be pretty if you had suitable clothes. Now, I earnestly want to help you. And as a business man of wide experience, I tell you frankly that you're foolish to listen to the Ott boy's big talk. He had unusual luck with his stilts and pickles. But that's what it was—pure luck and nothing else. If you listen to his crazy scheme of popularizing your pancake flour you'll probably lose everything. For he'll get you in the hole so deep you'll never be able to get out. This way you lose nothing. You get your education. Your grandpa gets a nice check, with regular pay checks coming in. And this cottage is here for you to use as long as you wish. Now, my child, *do* be sensible and urge your grandpa to sign this paper. Moreover, if we come to a friendly agreement to-night, I'm going to offer you a summer job in my factory. Nice easy work with good pay. Come, now. Here's my foun-

tain pen. Be a nice girl, Barbara. Be a *sensible* girl and do as I say."

The dirty old stinker! So that's why he had dished out that smooth gab about putting Silly to work. He wanted to get his clutches on Bobs. She looked so *big* to him, and so *strong!* Boy, did I ever want to grab a rotten egg and sock him through the open window!

He was there for more than an hour. And when he left he fairly punched holes in the ground with his big feet, so angrily did he step it off. For Bobs, losing her temper in the end, had told him to get out and stay out.

He went across the creek. A light sprang up in his office. We hadn't expected that. And curious to know what he was doing in his office at that time of night, Poppy sent me over there with orders to peep through the windows.

Which brings me close to one of the queerest and most baffling parts of my story. So read carefully, or *you* are going to be fooled.

CHAPTER IX

ANOTHER KNOCK-OUT

BEFORE starting me off by myself to investigate the light in the hinge manufacturer's office, Poppy had handed me a small pocket flashlight, without which I probably would have had a sweet time crossing the bridge. For, as I have mentioned, a good many of the planks were missing, some having rotted away of old age and others having recently been torn up. But I made it, though in the crossing I don't mind telling you that more than one shivery chill chased itself up and down my spine. For the water, as picked up by the faint beam of my flashlight, looked black and spooky. More than that it sounded spooky as it crawled snake-fashion in and out among the rocks. And there ahead of me, now completely buried in the smothering darkness, was that ghost-like building with its hidden window eyes.

Had I turned back then, as I was tempted to do, the others probably would have called me a calf. I realized that, all right. So, gritting my

teeth, I kept on. And pretty soon I came to the small detached office, through the open door of which I could see old Gimlet pacing the floor. He was all worked up. And though I was still kind of shivery in my backbone, I had to grin to myself as I watched him stomp back and forth like a caged tiger. Boy, he *looked* like a tiger, too. And it was well for me, all right, that he didn't know that I was watching him. For he rightly blamed Poppy and I for upsetting his schemes. And having met with defeat at every turn, as you might say, he probably would have choked us green in the face if he could have gotten his itching paws on us.

Then did I ever jump for cover as the penetrating beam of a pair of automobile headlights cut the darkness. Swinging up to the office door the car stopped with screeching brakes. Out jumped Silly. I could see, all right, that something had happened. For he fairly flew into the office, banging the door behind him.

"Say, Granddad!" he yipped excitedly, as he tumbled into the room. "I've been looking all over town for you."

Surprised to see the family nest egg there at that time of night, old Gimlet also looked apprehensive.

"What's the matter?" he growled, stopping heavily in his tracks, like an overloaded garbage

truck. "Have you and that Ott boy been fighting again? Or have you run out of money?"

"I know where we can get some money," the kid spoke in continued excitement.

"Humph!" the old man grunted, kind of sneering-like, though he probably wouldn't have done it if he had known that an outsider was listening in on his gab. "We wouldn't get much money if we had to depend on *you* earning it. For there isn't a lazier boy in this town."

Silly has a temper of his own.

"Oh! . . . quit razzing me," he growled, with a sort of swaggering I-should-worry gesture. "You give me a pain. For why should I work when you're rich?"

"I've been too lenient with you. All you do is wear out tires and burn up gasoline. The car is never at home when I need it."

"Then buy me a car of my own. I've told you a hundred times that we need two cars."

Old Gimlet, I guess, figured that he wasn't getting very far.

"You said something about making money," he got his voice under control. "What do you mean?"

The excited look returned to Silly's face.

"I didn't say anything about making money. But I know where we can find some. Money," he tried to make his voice sound as impressive

as possible, "that's been hidden for almost a hundred years, too."

"Um . . ." the speaker's scowl deepened. "Been reading some more of those trashy Wild-West stories, I see."

"Oh, go lay an egg," Silly scowled in pattern. "Who said anything about Wild-West stories? I'm talking about pirate treasure. *You* don't know it, but my great-grandfather hid a fortune in his mill. That's the money that I'm talking about. And it's pieces of eight, too. I heard Poppy Ott say so."

Gee-miny crickets! I guess you can imagine how surprised I was when I heard that. Then I pried open my ears wider than ever when the kid started telling how he had found out about the long-hidden treasure.

It was his hurried story that he had been hiding in the weeds near the dam. Chased by a huge turtle, he said, he was waiting to get a crack at it with his rifle. The turtle, though, didn't show up. It got dark. And then, hearing voices he had crawled deeper into the weeds. We had stopped within a few feet of him, he said. And he had overheard every word we said, all of which he now dished out to his equally excited grandparent.

"Well, well," says old Gimlet, rubbing his hands sort of miserly-like. And you should have

seen the gluttonous glitter in his eyes! "This is very interesting, Sylvester. Very interesting indeed. Um . . . I happen to know considerable about the lower structure of the old mill. There are indeed secret places there. I discovered them when I was a boy. But I never heard that there was any treasure hidden there."

"Poppy Ott says there is."

"The little brat!" old Gimlet found it hard to control his temper. "He *would* like to find a fortune, I suppose, and turn the whole thing over to my brother."

"If *I* found it," says Silly, "I'd keep it."

As though he needed to tell us that!

"But who's this man that you spoke about?" old Gimlet then inquired.

"Nobody knows. I saw him this afternoon. I saw the turtle, too, that I've been telling you about. The boys say the old geezer wears cold pancakes on his bald head."

"What?" old Gimlet stared.

"That's what they said," waggled Silly.

"But why should any man, unless he's crazy, wear cold pancakes on his bald head?"

"It's his story that he's trying to raise a new crop of hair."

"Folderol!" blurted old Gimlet, when the queer situation had been further explained to him. "Rank nonsense."

"Anyway," says Silly eagerly, "let's you and I see how much truth there is to this treasure story."

Then, as old Gimlet sort of reviewed the excited gab that had been dished out to him, I was struck by the sudden change that came over him. It puzzled me.

"As I understand it," says he, sort of measuring each word before he spoke it, "this 'treasure story,' as you call it, is nothing more than a theory. And I'm inclined to believe that it's a mighty slim theory at that. So I suggest that you go home and pile into bed. For we can do nothing in the old mill to-night. It's too dark. Besides, how about those boys? They're probably still over there. And to that point—drat their meddlesome hides!—they probably overheard every word I said. I wish you were a head taller, Sylvester. Then if the Ott boy picked on you again you could take him down and give him the beating of his life."

"I hate him even more than you do," Silly gritted his teeth.

"We've got to get rid of him," the old man jerked his head viciously. "If we don't, our business is going to suffer."

"Then you really think he'll start the mill?"

"Listen, Sylvester: I've known for years that there was a fortune in my brother's compounded

pancake flour. And I've often thought of taking over the mill myself, for, as you know, he's no business man. Oh, I intended to pay him well for the mill. And had my plans worked out he would have ended up a rich man. But now the Ott kid has stepped in. His schemes may fall flat. I hope so. For if he succeeds, our factory, to which I must give first consideration, is going to be crippled for power. And right at the peak of our busy season, too! I'd like to wring his confounded neck."

"If you were to ask me," says Silly, "he and Jerry Todd are a good pair."

"Yes," old Gimlet gave an impatient nod. "They're two of a kind. But I'll show them that they can't monkey with me."

"Now you're talking," says Silly gleefully.

Then, to my surprise, the grandson was sent home alone, old Gimlet letting on that he had some important work to do on the books. Silly didn't want to leave. He had his mind set on a treasure hunt. It would be fun, he said. And he rightly felt that it was risky, under the circumstances, to put off the search. But he finally gave in to his grandfather, though plainly disappointed over the latter's refusal to join him in the suggested adventure. I saw him get into the car and drive away. As for old Gimlet himself, no sooner had the car disappeared in the direction

of town than he stealthily turned off the office lights. I heard him lock the door. Then he set out again in the direction of the mill, only this time he carried a flashlight, the better, I figured, to escape detection. And did he ever pick his steps with care! Oh, baby! A human snake, and nothing else but.

Plainly he had lied to his grandson to get rid of him. He wanted to lift the treasure himself. Then there would be no talk. Not even his own kin would know that the treasure had been lifted. For he intended to keep it all and say nothing about it. At least, that's the way I looked at it.

The old miser! I sure despised him as I trailed him across the bridge, keeping well behind, of course, so as not to be seen or heard. Now that I had to move in the dark it was harder for me. But that was all right. Much less than complaining, I would have walked on hot nails to get the best of him. And it gave me a thrill of satisfaction to think how we were going to let him lead us to the goal, through his knowledge of the mill's secret places, and then yank the treasure away from him. Little did I dream, though, of the amazing things that were about to happen.

Heading straight for the old mill, the treasure hunter disappeared through the big door. And telling Scoop, who came up then, to watch the door until I returned, I beat it over to the cottage

to get Poppy. Suddenly I heard a scream. A sort of gurgling, gasping, horror-stricken scream. It sounded for all the world like old Gimlet himself. Something had him by the throat. At least that's the way it sounded to me. But when I got there, Poppy and Rory having followed me on the run, there stood the treasure hunter, a black shadow, in the mill doorway. He came out and started toward the cottage, which was now in total darkness, its owners having gone to bed. We saw him guardedly try the front door. Then he went stealthily around to the back door. Both were locked. But he was determined to get into the house. And spellbound we watched him pry loose a window screen and then the window itself.

Poppy finally found his voice.

"I'll be jiggered," he gasped in my ear. "Do you suppose the treasure is hidden in the cottage?"

My wits were at sea.

"But I heard him say," says I, "that there were secret places in the lower part of the old mill. He never mentioned the cottage."

Poppy turned to Scoop.

"How long was he in the mill?"

"Not more than five minutes."

"But what made him scream?"

"Gosh!" Scoop shivered, sort of hanging to my arm. "You tell me and I'll tell you."

"I thought he was being murdered," says Red, who, as you can imagine, was hovering around us with his heart in his throat.

"Maybe he's planning murder himself," says Poppy.

"We can stop that," says Peg, in his daring way.

"Look!" breathed Scoop. "He's raising the window."

It was then that I thought about the papers in the top part of the cupboard.

"I know!" I cried, in a low voice. "It isn't the treasure that he's after—it's the miller's papers. They're hidden in the kitchen cupboard."

"The dirty crook!" says Poppy.

"But let's *do* something," says Peg.

"We might crack him over the seat of the pants when he climbs in the window," was Poppy's crazy suggestion.

"And why not?" says Peg eagerly.

Boy, did I ever *want* to crack him, thieving miser that he was. So, everybody agreeing, we closed in on him. He was halfway through the window now. Up went our clubs—those nice big husky clubs! And at a signal from the leader we brought them down full force. Right on the

tight part of the old geezer's pants. And *yelp!* Say, you could have heard him a mile. He even woke up the chickens. Then, in quick neat work, we gave him a few more cracks for good measure, after which, as he doubled up, the raised window fell with a crash, striking him on the back of his head.

We didn't know, though, that he had been knocked cuckoo until his crumpled body fell at our feet. And did we ever get a shock when we flashed a light in his face. For it wasn't old Gimlet at all. It was Sir Hinkle. And there, bound on his bald head, was the usual pancake.

CHAPTER X

MORE SURPRISES

HAD old Gimlet been laid cold? I half suspected so. And so did Poppy. So you can imagine how excited we were. As for Red, he was so scared that his freckles had turned blue. He was sitting on a stump, he said, sucking a jawbreaker—though why he should talk about it now, the big nut, was beyond me. He had heard a scream. And the next thing he knew the jawbreaker had skidded the full length of his windpipe. A whole jawbreaker wasted! But he was glad, he let his gab run on, that it wasn't a marble. For one time he heard about a cow that swallowed a marble by accident and died. Or was it a goose? Anyway, it was something. And the next day the Modern Woodmen had a basket picnic, which was the time that he fell in the canal with his red necktie on, and so on and so forth. Talk about a *serial!* But he gets that way when he's scared. To shut him up Poppy piked him over to the spring to get a basin of water. Then, further dividing forces under the

leader's quick instructions, Peg and Scoop ran to the mill, later reporting that they could find not the slightest trace of the hinge manufacturer.

In the meantime, Bobs and her startled grandparent having been aroused, we carried the stricken man into the house, placing him on a couch in the sitting room. He was moaning piteously. And sick with fear that he'd die on our hands before the mystery of the hinge manufacturer's disappearance could be cleared up, and various other things, we hurriedly telephoned for our old friend Doc Leland.

It seemed ages to me before the lights of Doc's loose-jointed flivver came into sight on the opposite bank. And having been sent to meet him, to help him across the rickety bridge and thus save him from a possible broken leg, I hurriedly told him what had happened. We had bumped into another mystery, I said. And prominent in the mystery was an old geezer who wore cold pancakes on his bald head. We had caught him breaking into the miller's cottage, having pried open a window for that purpose. I told, too, how we had cracked the prowler on the seat of his pants with our clubs. To all of which Doc listened attentively. But I noticed, as he waddled along beside me, medicine case in hand, that he seemed most interested in the cold-pancake talk.

"Um . . ." says he, in that deep throaty way of his. "Cold pancakes seem suddenly to be all the vogue 'round here."

Which, I thought, was a kind of queer thing for him to say. But he didn't tell me then what he meant.

Peg and Scoop came running to meet us. And it was then that I learned of their fruitless search in the old mill. Either the hinge manufacturer's body had been hidden in some secret place, Peg declared, his eyes dancing excitedly, or something had lugged the body off.

Later, while Doc was working on the injured man, I took a look in the mill myself, hopeful of finding clews that the others had overlooked. And I don't mind telling you that my heart was in my throat as I guardedly tiptoed from one dusty room to another, the beam of my flashlight penetrating the cobwebby nooks and crevices. But, as Peg had said, there was no sign of old Gimlet. I turned my flashlight on the aged stone walls. But my careful search here brought no results, the walls stubbornly refusing to give up the secrets that they held.

Old Gimlet had spoken of the mill's "lower structure." There were indeed secret places there, he had said. But the only thing I saw when I peered down the damp stairs was dripping machinery. Big wooden pulleys, huge bevel gears

with wooden teeth and rusted shafting. Ragged canvas belts hung loosely here and there like waiting hangmen's nooses. And further down was a pool of inky water.

Davy's lair! I couldn't get that crazy thought out of my head. And keeping a safe distance from the spooky hole I called the turtle by name, my voice echoing weirdly in the well-like chamber. "Davey!" I called. "Davey Jones!" Then did I ever scoot up the stairs when a huge black snout poked itself out of the water. It was old Davey, all right! He and his queer master, having taken possession of the mill, were now working together. And between them they held the key to the hinge manufacturer's disappearance as well as the mill's other secrets.

I ran into Poppy at the head of the stairs, learning that Sir Hinkle had been put to bed in the miller's cottage. He was still out of his head. Nor was it improbable, I was told, that he would continue that way for several days. His whole system, Doc reported, seemed to have suffered a severe shock. It might even result in a case of brain fever.

It was our theory now that old Davey, faithful slave that he was and probably in complete sympathy with his master's evil schemes, had dragged the hinge manufacturer's body into the pool under the mill. Which was serious stuff.

Much too serious, in fact, for boys to handle, even Juvenile Jupiter Detectives. So we put in a second telephone call for Bill Hadley, the Tutter marshal, another old friend of ours, who, when he got there shortly after eleven o'clock, stomped noisily up and down the mill stairs, searching for hidden doors. But nothing was found. Nor did Davey again put in an appearance when I called his name.

"I'll grant," says Bill, in his rough way, when we paused to talk things over in the dusty grinding room, "that thar's somethin' blamed queer goin' on 'round here. But you fellers kain't make me believe that old Gimp has actually bin biffed off. Not by a jugful. As fur his body bein' lugged away by a *turtle*—sartinly, you boys ought to have better sense than to believe any sech truck as that."

I gave a sort of helpless gesture.

"But where is he?" says I, referring to the missing manufacturer. "We saw him go into the mill. And it's a cinch he isn't here now."

I've known Bill, homely geezer that he is, for many years. He and I are the best of friends, as I say. Some kids are scared to go into the town jail where he has his office. But the jail is old stuff to me. Bill even lets me sprinkle bug powder on the iron beds in the cells. Which shows you that he has an interest in my detective career

and wants to help me. At the same time he likes to pull my theories to pieces, letting on, because he's the oldest and most experienced, that he's lots the smartest.

"An' how do you know," says he, cocking his eyes at me sort of wise-like, "that it warn't the old pancake geezer that you follered across the creek?"

Poppy quickly picked that up.

"Meaning which?" says he, willing to consider any kind of a suggestion that would lead to a solution of the mystery.

"Wa-al," drawled Bill, "accordin' to Jerry's story, ol' Gimlet turned out the lights in his office. An' if the two men *had* bin schemin' to certain hidden ends, they could 'a' changed places then."

The leader turned to me.

"How about it, Jerry?" says he. "Was it the hinge manufacturer that you followed across the bridge, or the old pancake geezer?"

I told him the truth, the others listening intently.

"It could have been the pancake geezer," I admitted. "For all I saw was a moving shadow. But I think it was old Gimlet. Anyway, we know that he was in the mill. For we heard him scream."

It had been agreed among us that we were to say nothing to Bill about the hidden treasure.

For if the story got spread around town we could readily imagine what would happen. And, believe me, when it comes to keeping a secret Bill's no Sphinx. To that point, he probably would have turned treasure hunter himself along with the hundreds of others who would have been attracted to the spot if the story had leaked out.

So, having had stuff held back on him, it isn't surprising that he refused to see things as we did. And to back up his own theories he told about another business man—a banker, I believe—who skinned out, making it appear that he had been murdered. Gimp, Bill said, undoubtedly had a reason for disappearing—possibly money matters, or something like that. And he had called in the pancake geezer to help him out. They had changed places at the office, Gimp going his way (unseen by me) and the other geezer crossing the bridge, beyond which, on his way to the cottage, he had stopped in the mill to make it appear to us that murder had been committed there. And all the time, Bill wound up, old Gimlet, as he lay in hiding, undoubtedly was chuckling to himself over his cleverness.

Which, I'll grant, was a very picturesque theory. But we knew that Bill was all wet. However, we didn't argue with him. For the less he did in working on the mystery the more we could do. And we sure wanted to do a lot. For

if we could find the hinge manufacturer's body, thus proving that he had indeed been laid cold, and recovered the long-hidden treasure, it would be a feather in our cap. Once again credit would be heaped on the great Juvenile Jupiter Detective Association, of which we were the sole and exclusive representatives in Tutter.

Here's how our theories differed: Bill contended that something had come up, probably in connection with the factory's finances, to make old Gimlet want to disappear. So he had sent for Sir Hinkle to help him out, the "disappearance" having then been arranged between them. Which was one possible explanation of why the old turtle geezer had come to town. But it was our belief that Sir Hinkle, possibly a pirate himself in his younger days, had been attracted here by hidden treasure, the key to which was the odd turtle. Further, Bill contended that the scream we had heard was a fake. It wasn't old Gimlet, he said, but the pancake geezer. And the whole thing was a frame-up. While, on the other hand, we still clung to the belief that old Gimlet, having entered the mill to penetrate its secrets, and learn for himself if there was indeed treasure hidden there, had been tackled in the dark, the turtle later disposing of the body—which, I might add, was the part of our theory that Bill ridiculed the most. A *turtle* lugging off a man's body!

Haw! haw! haw! That was a good joke. We were smart boys, he said, patting us sort of condescending-like on the head, and in time we might make fairly good detectives. But we needed to use a puckering string on our imaginations.

After which, having failed to find any clots of human blood or mangled toenails lying around loose, he piled into his old flivver and hurried back to town, Red and Rory accompanying him, Red's mother, it seems, in learning where he was, having telephoned sharply for him to come home and take his Saturday-night bath.

Doc was waiting for us in the cottage.

"An' whar did you fellers say you hit the old gent with your clubs?" he inquired, sort of searching our faces.

"On the seat of his pants," says Peg.

"Humph!" grunted Doc, wiggling his big nose until his wabbly glasses settled into place. "You're the first fellers I ever heard of that could sock a man on the seat of his pants an' raise a welt on the back of his head."

"The falling window did that," Peg explained with a grin.

"Oh! . . ." the expression changed on Doc's face. "That's the how of it, huh? I see." Gathering up his lung tester and other truck he carelessly chucked the whole mass into his shabby bag. "Well," he pulled down his gravy-spotted

vest, "I've done all I kin. I'll be 'round to see the patient in the mornin'. An' in the meantime someone should see to it that he gits that pink medicine every hour an' the green medicine every half hour. . . . Things all settled in the mill?" he inquired in conclusion.

Told them that the marshal had come and gone, without making any discoveries of importance, Doc drew our attention to the pancake that he had removed from the invalid's bald head.

"Does Bill know about this?" he grunted sort of thoughtful-like.

"Yes," I nodded.

"What did he say about it?"

"Nothing."

"An' what do you boys think about it?" the speaker eyed us sharply.

"Well," I shrugged, holding back what I knew about the probable treasure, "it's a blamed queer mess, to say the least."

"An' you have no belief in the old man's story that he come here to cure his bald head?"

"No."

"I never heerd myself," Doc spoke thoughtfully, "that thar's anything miraculous about cold pancakes, either fur internal or external use. An' if this was the only case that had come to my attention I'd conclude naturally that the man was

runnin' off at the head. Frankly, though, I'm puzzled."

And he showed it, too.

"What do you mean?" Poppy inquired quickly, sensing, I guess, that Doc was leading up to something of importance.

"We had a bad accident downtown this evenin'. While crossin' Main Street ol' Cap'n Tinkertop was struck by a passin' car. He, too, so I was told by the doctors who took care of him at the Emergency Rooms, strangely had a cold pancake tied on his bald head."

And Cap'n Tinkertop, the thought jumped quickly into my head, had just gone to work for the now missing hinge manufacturer! Gee-miny crickets! What kind of a crazy mystery were we mixed up in, anyway?

Do *you* see any sense to it? We didn't at the time. But when we heard about the Cap'n's pancake we saw right off that these cakes, as worn so peculiarly by the two old men, was a much more important part of the mystery than we had suspected.

Eager to get the Cap'n's story, and thus clear up the mystery, we hurried to town with Doc, learning, when we tumbled into the Emergency Rooms, that our old friend was on his way to Ashton in the town ambulance. His skull having been cracked, the doctors in charge of the case

were going to perform an emergency operation. And it was entirely possible, we were told, that the patient would never live to return to his home.

Heading for our own homes, it now being close to midnight, we felt pretty blue. It would be tough to lose the Cap'n. For he was a true friend, even if he did play tricks on us, one of which entered so prominently into my *Purring Egg* story. Nor was there a better dancer in the whole county. Boy, the fun I've had watching him spin around and around on his peg-leg! Yet how queer, I thought, unable to keep the mystery out of my mind, that both pancake wearers should have been knocked out on the same night. It seemed like an act of fate.

"Be around to-morrow morning bright and early," says Poppy, when we came to the corner where we usually separated. "For we've got a lot of work to do."

"Milling," says I, "or detecting?"

"Both," says he shortly.

"On *Sunday?*" says I, giving him a sort of surprised look.

"That's right," says he. "I forgot about it being Sunday. So we'll let the milling go till Monday. But there's plenty of other work to do. You say the mill walls defied you to-night. But

if they contain secret places, we've got to find them."

"And how about Davey Jones?" says I, mighty thankful that the big-mouthed turtle was a mile away.

"I was just wondering," says Poppy, "if we hadn't ought to shoot him."

"If we did," says I, "we probably would be surprised by the things we found inside of him."

I meant collar buttons and things like that.

"Now that we've connected old Cap'n Tinkertop with the mystery," says Poppy, sort of reflective-like, "I'm beginning to think that there *is* something phony about the hinge manufacturer's disappearance. He may be the victim of a conspiracy."

"What's that?" I showed my ignorance.

But Poppy, instead of answering my question, began talking about the mystery in general.

"It's a queer mess, Jerry, just as you told Doc Leland. I can't make head nor tail of it. But you can bet your boots that Cap'n Tinkertop, lazy old coot that he is, had a *reason* for hiring out to the hinge manufacturer. He—meaning the Cap'n—is the one, probably, who brought the old turtle geezer to town, and not the hinge manufacturer, as Bill believes. So you can see what I mean by a possible conspiracy. The

Cap'n and Sir Hinkle are working together—or, rather, they *were* working together until they both got knocked out. A spy, the Cap'n picked off that job at the hinge factory to keep an eye on things out there and complete his plans. Then, at the proper time, along came old Sir Hinkle. But why the two men should wear cold pancakes on their bald heads is a riddle to me. Bill says we're going to hear amazing things if old Sir Hinkle can be made to talk. And I sure believe it."

"Then it's Bill's intention," says I, "to try and make the old man talk?"

"The first thing in the morning," nodded Poppy.

"But what if Sir Hinkle disappears like old Mr. Arnoldsmith?" says I, thinking of our *Whispering Mummy* adventure.

"Bobs has promised to keep a sharp eye on the invalid. And she sure knows her stuff. He'll never get away from her."

Taking a short cut through Red's back yard I caught sight of the freckled one in the lighted kitchen. Dressed in his pajamas—and were they ever loud!—he had his mug stuck in the open refrigerator.

I stopped to have a bite with him.

"Dad's out of luck," he mumbled over the top of a big sandwich.

"What's the matter?" I mumbled in pattern.

"Our bathtub's on the bum."

"Did it crack to-night," says I genially, "when it got a look at your dirty feet?"

"The drain's plugged up."

"Well," I gave him another dig, which, of course, was all in fun, "what can you expect?"

"Ma thinks it's a wash rag. And will there ever be a hot time in the old town to-night when Aunt Pansy learns that it's her switch."

Mrs. Pansy Bibble, whose husband years ago fell into the Illinois River and never came up for air, is one of the family fixtures at Red's house.

"I found her switch hanging in the bathroom," he told me. "And thinking that it would be fun to fool Rory, who was hanging around, I put it on, figuring that he'd drop dead when he opened the bathroom door and found a lady in the tub."

"Who wouldn't?" I blushed.

"But when I let out a yell Aunt Pansy got there first, thinking, I guess, that I was choking on a bar of soap. So I quickly yanked off the switch and chucked it into the water, never noticing that I had pulled the plug with my foot. The blamed old switch was no good anyway, for the hair all came out when it got soaked up. But Aunt Pansy, of course, will raise Hail Columbia when she learns of her loss."

Then, at mention of Bobs' name, he hap-

pened to recall that she had telephoned to him in search of me.

"She told me to tell you," he drained a milk bottle, "that her grandfather just found a pair of shoes near the spring."

"Shoes?" I repeated, my appetite suddenly deserting me.

"Old Gimlet's shoes," he added, with raspberry pie oozing out of the corners of his mouth.

Boy, I suddenly felt faint. So, getting up, I wabbled toward home. What was it, I pressed on my scattered wits, that the old pancake geezer had said? Oh, yes! "Boots an' shoes is the one thing that ol' Davey *won't* eat."

Gosh! I guess we knew now, all right, where old Gimlet was. In Davey's big stomach, and nothing else but.

CHAPTER XI

SIFTING THE KNOWN FACTS

HERE was new stuff. And the leader, I figured, in mounting excitement, ought to know about it. Absolutely. So I hurried to the telephone as soon as I got home.

"I want to speak with Poppy," says I, when old Mr. Ott himself sleepily answered the late call.

"Um . . ." came the characteristic throaty grunt. "Is that you, Jerry Todd?"

"Sure thing," says I quickly.

"What do you mean," the old man's voice then too on a sharper note, "gittin' me out of bed at this time of night?"

"Please call Poppy," says I, kind of impatient-like. "It's important."

"They hain't nothin' so important as sleep," he snapped. "So go to bed an' git some of it yourself, you two-legged tomcat. As for Poppy, if he stays out another night like this I'll take a shingle to him, I will. An' I'll use it right

on his bar' setter, too, whar it'll smart good an' proper."

After which the odd old man, than whom I never expect to have a kinder friend, sharply hung up the receiver.

Dad was waiting for me at the head of the stairs.

"And what now?" says he, giving me a quizzical look. "Another rose-colored frog mystery?"

"*Talking* frog," I corrected, referring to one of our earlier adventures.

I sure have a peach of a dad. I'll tell the world! And I wouldn't trade him for all the other dads in the whole state of Illinois, which isn't saying, though, that the rest of the Illinois dads aren't all right. Of course they are. But I like mine the best. At first he kind of laughed at me about being a detective. I don't mean he ridiculed me—he *never* does that, nor Mother either, bully good scout that she is, and the best potato frier in the whole town. But I could tell, all right, from the way he looked at me that he was snickering up his sleeve. He thought it was funny to hear me talk so earnest-like about robberies and murders. But he admits now that I have done some mighty good work. And he's proud of the interest that other

boys take in my adventures, as printed in the books of this series.

Yet it's his sensible idea that sleep is as necessary to a growing boy as beefsteak and gravy. And having broken one of the rules of the house by staying out till midnight I had to tell him now, as I hurriedly got into my pajamas, where I had been.

This time, I said, talking excitedly, we were mixed up in a pancake mystery. And did he ever stare at me when I told him that old Gimlet (he knew, all right, who I meant) was on his way to heaven in a turtle's stomach. The empty shoes as found at the spring were sufficient proof in themselves, I wound up, of the old manufacturer's fatal finish.

Dad had a grin on his face now.

"I'll grant," says he, "that your theory is more exciting than Bill's. But having heard the complete story I'm inclined to agree with the marshal. For I happen to know, Jerry, that old Gimp is facing probable patent litigation, which could very easily be the reason for his disappearance, and not factory finances, as Bill suggested."

My head was in a whirl. Nor should it be wondered at, either. For conflicting theories had been jumping at me thick and fast. One minute, so to speak, I was perched on a horse. The next

minute I was zigzagging here and there on a bicycle. And then, in the flicker of an eyelash, I was back on the same old nag, only it's mane and tail had changed color.

"Several years ago," Dad then told me, as we sat together sort of chummy-like on the edge of the bed, "a Chicago hinge company protested Gimp's patent, claiming infringement. But having the most money Gimp at the time bluffed the other fellow down. The case never went to court. Now the Chicago company, a small concern in itself, has been absorbed by a hardware syndicate worth millions. And convinced that a fortune in royalties is due them—from old Gimp, I mean—it's their intention, I understand, to reopen the case and fight it to a finish. In fact, they already have reopened it, as I learned last week through the local Chamber of Commerce. Frankly, putting all personalities aside, I hope that nothing interferes with Gimp's business. Not that I approve of his ways of doing business. But it isn't to be denied that his factory is furnishing employment, of a sort, to a large number of men and women. Just now the company is at the peak of its busy season. Orders are rolling in. And having been threatened with injunction proceedings, it wouldn't surprise me a bit if Gimp, old fox that he is, has elected to disappear. Though what connection there can

be between his probable disappearance and these cold pancakes that you tell me about is more than I can figure out."

An injunction, I then learned, was a sort of warrant. It had to be served on some member of a company. In this case old Gimlet was the whole works—president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and general manager. By disappearing, he left no one behind on whom the injunction papers could be served. And thus his factory couldn't be stopped—which, of course, was the injunction's purpose.

"But if old Gimlet disappeared of his own accord," says I, still confused, "how do you account for the empty shoes?"

"He probably put them there himself," replied Dad.

"To make us think that the turtle had made a meal of him?"

"Sure thing."

"But where is he now?" says I helplessly.

"That," Dad shot a kind of warm grin at me, "is a good job, *I* should say, for the local branch of the great Juvenile Jupiter Detective Association."

I felt pretty big.

"If he's really hiding in the old mill," says I confidently, "we'll find him. Or if he and Davey Jones' digestive organs are hobnobbing

together we can prove *that,* too. For all we have to do is to kill the turtle and use a butcher knife on him."

"Oh," says Dad quickly, "let's hope that the old man isn't dead."

I then recalled some of the things I had overheard that night in the manufacturer's office. And sort of letting myself believe, for theorizing purposes, that he *had* framed up his own disappearance (figuring that if he kept out of sight for three months the added profits from his business would pay the costs of the impending lawsuit), I wondered if Silly was wise to the secret program. I quickly concluded, though, that this couldn't be the case. In fact, I could see now *why* the kid had been sent home. It wasn't so much to enable his scheming grandparent to singly lift the hidden treasure as it was to give the latter a chance to disappear according to schedule —though, of course, the treasure never would escape old Gimlet's hands if he got a crack at it.

But was it true, as Dad and Bill Hadley believed, that old Gimlet and Sir Hinkle had changed places in the dark, each to go ahead with secret work of his own in ways that had been arranged between them? And, to much the same point, had the old pancake geezer been instructed to first scream in the mill (for our

benefit) and then steal the miller's papers? Still, I reflected, that didn't make sense. For if Sir Hinkle knew that we were there (assuming that he *had* screamed for our benefit), why had he been so open in his later movements? He had made no effort to dodge us. So if he really knew that we were there, it would almost seem that he had invited capture—a bewildering probability in itself. Or, to still another view, why hadn't old Gimlet stolen the papers himself?

Then, too, Bill had suggested that Sir Hinkle and the Cap'n were working together. A sort of conspiracy, or something, to use Poppy's words, directed at the hinge manufacturer. Still, I didn't like that thought, as it involved my old wooden-legged friend. For "conspiracy" had a bad sound. As for linking the three together—old Gimlet himself and the two pancake wearers—that was out of the question. For the Cap'n had showed plainly enough that afternoon that he thoroughly despised his employer. Either old Gimlet and Sir Hinkle were working together, or Sir Hinkle and the Cap'n. I knew it couldn't be the Cap'n and the manufacturer.

A spy! That is what Poppy had called him—meaning the Cap'n, of course. And maybe, I now told myself, he *was* a spy, possibly put there by the new hinge syndicate. That was a sound theory. Yet what sense could be attached

to the old man's new notion of wearing a cold pancake on his bald head? And there was Sir Hinkle, another pancaker. Was *he* a spy, too? Or was he a treasure hunter, and that only, as we had earlier suspected? If so, did the Cap'n know about the treasure? Was he to have had a part in its recovery? But why had he picked Sir Hinkle to help him lift the treasure? Or, to turn that thought around, why had Sir Hinkle picked him? And who was Sir Hinkle, anyway? He seemed to be very well informed on things hereabouts. So he must have lived here at some time or other. But what could be his object in coming back to his old home with a pancake on his bald head? Certainly, I wasn't goofy enough to take any stock in that letter of his. That was just a blind. And his whole purpose in writing the letter was to mislead its readers, chiefly the old miller himself.

Which led to still another thought. Could it be possible that the suggested "conspiracy" was directed at both the miller and his wealthy brother? Gosh! It was a pancake mystery, all right. And pancakes were a product of the elder brother's mill. Still, I knew that the Cap'n never would lift a finger to harm old Peter Gimp. No, indeed. For the two old men were friends of long standing. Nor would the Cap'n have turned

a hand to lifting treasure that belonged in part to the present mill owner. More probably, I told myself, the two pancakers were working secretly in the miller's behalf. And yet they had deceived him!—one had written a letter to him, I mean, letting on that his pancakes were a cure for bald heads. Which sounded like a joke. But I knew it wasn't a joke.

As for old Davey, so completely hedged in was he by a forest of question marks, that it was useless, I saw, to theorize on his part in the mystery, unless he was indeed the key to the probable hidden treasure, as we have suspected.

Having heard the whole disjointed story, Dad threw up his hands helplessly. It was much too deep for him, he admitted. For everything that seemed worthy of consideration contradicted everything else.

So we went to bed. And in less than five minutes I was sound asleep. Nor did I open my eyes until the alarm clock went off at six thirty.

Mother and Dad seldom get up on Sunday till eight thirty. So, jumping into my clothes and scooting down the stairs, I hurriedly got my own breakfast. Boy, it was a peachy morning. Puddles of sunshine everywhere. Already the warm May air was full of droning sounds, for the bees and their kind begin work with the

rising sun. And as though to let me know how happy *they* were, the robins in the near-by trees fairly slit their throats.

All of which, I told myself, sort of contented-like, as I accidentally dropped the cream pitcher on the cat, was a lucky omen. Soon now the mystery would be solved. And the credit for its solution would partly be mine.

CHAPTER XII

WHAT RED SAW THROUGH THE KEYHOLE

"I UNDERSTAND," says I, when I joined Poppy at the corner of Main and Elm Streets, "that you almost got skinned alive last night."

"Meaning which?" says he, eying me.

"Didn't you hear your dad talking with me over the telephone?" I grinned.

"No," he shook his head.

Then we both laughed merrily as I repeated the telephone conversation to him.

"Dad's funny, isn't he, Jerry? But I guess we both know, though, that his bark is worse than his bite."

"There's only one better dad in the whole world," says I feelingly. "And that's my own."

After which, as we hurried down the street in the direction of Pirate's Bend, I told him about the empty shoes. At the time, I admitted, I was dead sure that they sort of symbolized old Gimlet's fatal finish, which explained my late telephone call. But in talking the matter over with Dad, who had told me a lot of stuff about hinge

patents and other truck (all of which I now repeated to the interested leader), I had quickly dropped the theory that the hinge manufacturer had disappeared down old Davey's expansive gullet. Instead, I wound up, there was every reason to believe that the vanished manufacturer was now craftily hiding in the old mill. And unless we wanted to lose the treasure it was up to us, as capable Juvenile Jupiter Detectives, to uncover his hiding place without delay.

"I hate the sight of him," says Poppy, "but, even so, I'm glad to learn that he's still alive. Though, if I must tell you the truth, Jerry, I couldn't at any time quite make myself believe, as you did, that the turtle was responsible for his disappearance, either dead or alive. I know you saw the turtle in the cellar of the old mill. And, considering the circumstances, I don't blame you for being scared out of your wits. But old Davey, I believe, is much less of a peril than we first suspected."

"And do you still believe, Poppy," I quizzed, "that he was brought here to help lift the hidden treasure?"

"The only answer I could make to that," says the leader, "would be added theory. And I'm convinced now that we're doing entirely too much theorizing. For what have we gained? When it comes right down to brass tacks, we don't know

a thing. You now contend that old Gimlet is hiding in the mill. But you have no proof of that. Nor have you any proof that he planned his own disappearance. We haven't proof of anything except that two goofy old men have been wandering around the landscape with cold pancakes tied on their bald heads. Yet *why?* Do you know? I don't."

Bill overtook us just before we came within sight of the mill pond.

"Out bright an' early, I see," says he, shoving one of his homely grins at us.

"It's the early bird," quoted Poppy, as we climbed into the crowded front seat of the marshal's flivver, "that gets the most worms."

"I've pondered this matter considerable," Bill then made himself look wise. "An' I've come to the practical conclusion that the cold pancakes are a joke. Fur mebbe you heard that ol' Cap'n Tinkertop, who was run down last night, had the pancake habit, too. An' everybody knows what an ol' joker *he* is. Anyway, thar couldn't be any sense to a trick like that, which way nor t'other. It's *got* to be a joke. Thar hain't no gittin' round it. An' if that ol' geezer in the miller's cottage kin talk—he's the one who started the joke, I figger—I'm goin' to make him dish out the hull an' unvarnished truth. As fur ol' Gimlet hisself, it's the story in town, as I heard

it late last night, that he either had to skin out or git closed down."

"But who's going to run the business?" says Poppy, as we further discussed that theory.

"Havin' always run it hisself," says Bill, "I figger he'll still find a way of keepin' in touch with it. Fur don't kid yourself into thinkin' that he's very far off. Not by a jugful. I wouldn't be surprised if he's watchin' us this very minute."

"Then you think he's hiding in his factory?" says Poppy, as we tumbled out of the car within sight of the rambling building.

"Why not?" was Bill's comeback. "It's full of nooks an' queer turns. By hidin' here he could keep in touch with his foremen. They wouldn't dast talk. If they did, they'd git canned. They'd have to do as he said, even lyin' 'bout his whereabouts if a lawyer from the other concern showed up with an injunction. Not that the hide-an'-seek business kin go on furever. But thar's big money rollin' in now. An' money means life itself to that old sucker."

"Tell me," says Poppy, sort of switching the conversation into new channels, "did you know Cap'n Tinkertop when you were a boy?"

"Shore thing."

"Did you ever hear that he had friends among pirates?"

"Heh?" Bill let out his hairy neck. *"Pirates,* you say? What kind of gab is that?"

"I kind of have a hunch," says Poppy thoughtfully, as we walked toward the bridge, "that this old pancake geezer in the miller's cottage used to be a pirate. And I further think his turtle earlier belonged to other pirates. Queer actions have accompanied his appearance here. And these queer actions have been shared by the Cap'n. So the two must be old friends. For nothing short of a warm friendship would have induced the Cap'n to follow the other's queer pancake habits."

Watching Bill, I saw a queer excited look cross his homely face. It was a kind of crafty look, too. Poppy had given him a clew. But he wasn't as fair with us as we were with him. For he shut up like a clam. Nor would he let us follow him into the miller's cottage.

"He knows now who the old pancake geezer is," I cried excitedly. "Your talk put him wise. And afraid that we'll solve the mystery ahead of him he's trying to shut us out."

Poppy laughed.

"With all of his pretended friendship, I dare say he *would* shut us out if there was any money in it for him. But don't let it excite you, Jerry. For he's several miles from the mystery's true

solution. Nor will he learn anything here this morning, either to prove or disprove his theories. For Bobs told me over the phone that the patient is lying in a coma."

Which was indeed the case. And failing to get any information in the sick room, Bill came out of the house looking kind of grouchy. Later Poppy and I had a brief talk with the miller, whose weary eyes showed the results of his broken rest. Yes, he told us, showing us the shoes that he had picked up near the spring, he was sure that they belonged to his brother. So we hiked it over to the spring, Bill in the meantime having grumpishly gone back to town. But we found no added clews. Yet I thought queerly of the round deep spring as a cunning, crafty eye as we stood beside it. And I was glad to leave it behind us. For its restlessness reminded me of a troubled conscience.

Now that Bill had cleared out, we had the free run of the house. And noticing the heavy rings under Bobs' eyes, we took charge of the patient while she went off to her own room to get some needed sleep. Then, when she returned, we searched the pockets of the patient's clothes, figuring that if he *had* swiped the Sir Hinkle Funny-duster card it would still be in his possession. Nor were we disappointed. It was Eva Ringer's card, we told Bobs, who had followed our work

with curious eyes. Then while I helped her hide the old man's money under the bedroom carpet —for we had found six hundred dollars in bills in his pockets—Poppy got out the family album.

"Yes," I heard scraps of conversation from the parlor, where the leader and the miller were bent over the album, "that is my Aunt Hettibell. She was a Bloomfield before she married. And that's Sylvester and I when we were boys. What's that? Oh, yes. That's his picture over there. It was taken on his sixteenth birthday. Yes, indeed. He and Cap'n Tinkertop, both boys at the time, were thicker than twin peas in a pod."

That was interesting! And I would have crossed the room to learn who they were talking about if Doc Leland hadn't waddled into sight just without the front door. Cap'n Tinkertop, we were told, was holding his own. And in leaving, ten minutes later, Doc gave us much the same report on the patient in the spare bedroom.

Mother, I knew, wouldn't like it if I skipped Sunday school. So shortly after nine o'clock the leader and I lit out for home, having failed again to uncover any secret doors or passageways in the old mill. Nor had we seen anything of the turtle. The mystery seemed suddenly to have settled into a strange coma, like the patient himself.

Was this the quietness that usually preceded a violent storm? I wondered, with a strange uneasiness. For even Poppy, I noticed, was peculiarly quiet. Something was going on in his mind. Something big and sort of dynamic. For I knew that kid!

"Did Bobs ever show you her uncle's picture?" he finally inquired.

"Old Sylvester?" I inquired, in turn.

"No. Rufus Gimp."

I stared, the stories that I had heard about the younger brother jumping into my mind.

"Was that the picture that you and the miller were talking about?" says I quickly.

"Sure thing," he grinned.

Then, speaking in a low, earnest voice, he told me that he had every reason to believe that the man in the sick room was none other than Rufus Gimp himself.

"But Rufus Gimp was hanged!" I cried, in growing excitement.

"Yes," Poppy nodded. "That's what I've been told. But there have been other cases of mistaken identity. Someone was hanged. There's no doubt about that. And if it was a companion of Rufus Gimp's, instead of Gimp himself, I'm surprised that the English prison authorities were so easily fooled. . . . Have you got a mole on your elbow, Jerry?"

"No," I told him.

"Did you ever hear of anybody with a mole on his elbow?"

"No," says I again.

"Then it's quite probable, don't you think, that elbow moles are somewhat uncommon?"

"What are you driving at?" I spoke impatiently.

"The point is, Jerry, that Rufus Gimp had a mole on his right elbow. The miller told me so. And Sir Hinkle Funnyduster has a mole on *his* right elbow, though a clever attempt was made to hide it in a tattoo design. So there you are."

"And you think that Bill suspects the truth of the sick man's identity?" I inquired, in continued excitement.

"Sure thing," grinned Poppy. "But please don't disillusion him, Jerry. For he thinks that he has the secret all to himself."

I got kind of cold.

"Do you suppose," says I, "that the English government would pay a reward to Bill if he turned the pirate over to them?"

"That isn't improbable," Poppy admitted.

"It shan't be done!" I cried, thinking of Bobs.

"But law is law, Jerry. And if a man does wrong he's got to pay the penalty, even though he escapes capture till the closing year of his life."

"Yes," I cried, carried away by my excitement,

"and the law says that Rufus Gimp is dead. *Dead,* I tell you. And they can't hang a man twice. You *think* the pancake geezer is Rufus Gimp. But you're wrong. It's Sir Hinkle Funnyduster," I cried, "and nobody else but."

My excitement amused Poppy.

"All right," he laughed. "Let's call him Sir Hinkle Funnyduster, just as you say. That's agreeable with me. For I have no desire to see him lugged back to England and hanged. I *would* like to know, though," the leader continued thoughtfully, "why he came here at this late day. With a pancake on his head! And accompanied by a giant turtle! You say he looked bitter that day in the weeds when he quizzed you about his two brothers. Naturally he would feel bitter toward them. For they had everything. And he had nothing."

"How about his six hundred bucks?" I reminded.

"I'm talking about property now."

"He didn't look bitter when he spoke of his brother Peter," I corrected. "But he sure did show his feelings when he mentioned the other brother."

"Which proves to my satisfaction," was Poppy's sensible conclusion, "that his sole purpose in coming here, at the tail end of his life,

was to help his elder brother. And how natural that he should go to his old friend Cap'n Tinkertop! Between them they cooked up some kind of a scheme—or possibly Sir Hinkle, much less of a rogue than we first suspected, had the scheme in mind before he came to town. To carry out the scheme he had to have a giant turtle. Why? *Good* night, don't ask *me* why. I can't tell you. Nor can I tell you why the old men took to wearing pancakes on their bald heads. But that was all a part of the scheme. Now, one of them is holding down a hospital bed in Ashton. And the other one is laid up here. Fate seemingly played them a raw deal. And it's our duty, I feel, to help them. What do you say?"

"Absolutely," I bit off the word.

With the two old men laid up I figured that the local buckwheat pancake situation would settle down to normal. That is, I hadn't the least suspicion that there was still another pancake wearer in town. Imagine my amazement then when Red Meyers tackled me at the church, with eyes as big as saucers.

"Grab me quick," says he, rolling his eyes kind of wild-like, "before I go cuckoo."

"What's the matter?" says I quickly.

"The whole town's crazy," says he. "And I'm the craziest of all."

"Of course," says I, kind of placating-like. "We all know that. But tell me what's on your mind besides red hair."

"Hair!" he jumped at the word, reminding me for all the world of a cat springing on a helpless mouse. *"Hair!* That's it. You know what I told you last night about Aunt Pansy's false hair? I lost it down the bathtub drain pipe. I thought I'd catch Hail Columbia. So, imagine how surprised I was this morning when she told me at the breakfast table that she wasn't going to wear false hair any more. I saw her go upstairs with a pancake. A *pancake,* mind you. Sure thing, one of Gimp's pancakes. And when I peeked through the keyhole I saw her sitting in the middle of her room with the pancake on her head. Yes, sir, *on her head.* She has a bald spot, you know. And the pancake was on the bald spot. Hang onto me, Jerry. If you don't I'll throw a fit. Pancakes! Pancakes! Pancakes! And *her* sitting there reading 'The Milkmaid's Revenge,' with a pancake on her head! I blinked and I staggered and I squawked. And I felt of my own head to make sure that I wasn't wearing a pancake myself. For I figured that I must be cuckoo. I figured that she was cuckoo, too. Everybody was cuckoo. . . . Wouldn't you swallow your false teeth, Jerry, if the minister came into the pulpit this

morning with a pancake tied on his head? And why not?" the question was accompanied by a wild gesture. "Everybody's doing it."

Here an elderly couple passed us on their way into the church. I watched them as the man reverently removed his hat at the door, half expecting to see a pancake on his head. But his head was bare, proof in itself that as yet not all of the bald heads in Tutter were wearing cold pancakes.

Of *all* the crazy junk!

CHAPTER XIII

BACK IN SCHOOL

I MIGHT as well come right out and tell you that I got very little good out of the Sunday school lesson that day. For I had too many pancakes and bald heads jumbled up in my mind. But I tried to listen to the teacher. Then, when it came time for church, Red and I stationed ourselves outside the door. And every time a man removed his hat we sort of held our breath, our necks going in and out, goose-fashion. Once we thought sure that we had spotted still another pancaker. But it was old Mr. Robbins with the usual handkerchief parked on his naked head. Nor was it a very clean handkerchief at that! Boy! It sure looked like a well-worn pancake, all right. Curious over this habit of his of wearing a handkerchief on his head in church, I asked him about it one time, thinking that possibly he did it to keep the flies from waking him up. For flies naturally would skid around on a slippery place like that. But it was his story, as dished out to me at the time in a thin, piping voice, so

peculiar to very old people, that he was afraid of drafts.

Having invited Poppy to eat dinner with me, I picked him up in front of his own church, telling him, as we jogged west in the direction of Main Street, of Red's amazing discovery through the keyhole. Aunt Pansy, I said, had strangely contracted the pancake habit. Secretly wearing Gimp's pancakes in her room, it was her belief apparently that the cold pancakes would perform miracles on her bald spot. She even had thrown away her old wigs. At least, I wound up, that was the tale that Red had dished out to me.

Having followed my story with puzzled eyes, Poppy gave as his opinion then that Red was kidding me.

"For Mrs. Biggle," says he, "is a sensible woman. And what woman with good sense would do a trick like that?"

But when we tackled Red about it in front of his house, where he was eating the crackers that his aunt had put out for the family parrot, he declared up and down, in his gabby way, that he was telling the truth. He even offered to take us upstairs and show us the pancake that his aunt had hidden in her lower dresser drawer. So we followed him up the carpeted stairs. And, sure enough, there was the pancake just as he had said, neatly put away under Mr. Biggle's

wedding vest. And there on the dresser was "The Milkmaid's Revenge," just as its fat reader had put it down. Leaving, we told Red to pump his aunt, if possible, and thus learn where she had picked up the pancake idea. For certainly, we concluded, it was no original notion of hers. And the source of her information regarding the stuff's supposed miraculous hair-growing powers could very easily be an important clew. Which shows you how careful a good detective is not to overlook a matter of even the smallest importance.

Dad likes Poppy. So does Mother. They rightly think he's a whiz without wheels. And I'm given all kinds of encouragement to bring him home with me. So we had a merry time that noon, as the mashed potatoes and chicken gravy melted out of sight, Dad telling me toward the close of the swell meal that the management of the local hotel had received word to reserve rooms for the president of the National Hardware and Hinge Syndicate, who, with his party, was due to arrive in Tutter, according to report, the following morning.

"So, as you can see," Dad wound up, referring to our earlier discussion of the mystery, "old Gimp didn't disappear any too soon."

That afternoon we heard other people talking about the coming financier, whose name, we

learned, was J. Mortimer Potts. It sounded kind of big. And when the expected visitor arrived that evening, several hours ahead of time, he acted just as big as his name sounded. Nor was he satisfied with one or two rooms at the Commercial House like an ordinary guest. No, sir-ee! Nothing but a suite was good enough for J. Mortimer Potts—only *he* called it a "sweet." So there was a lot of hustle and bustle at the hotel as old connecting doors were pried open. There was a chauffeur, too, a uniformed colored man who drove the biggest and flashiest car that I ever set eyes on. Honest, that car was longer than seventeen Fords, or almost that long. Other members of the party were the financier's personal secretary, a lantern-jawed woman who answered sharply to the name of Miss Walters, and a pair of long-faced undertakers who later turned out to be lawyers. When we got a look at the whole outfit, I could hardly blame old Gimlet for disappearing. For the financier in particular had come prepared to get his competitor's hide, and nothing else but. Honest, I kind of felt sorry for old Gimp. And it made me hot to think that outsiders should horn in this way and try to cripple one of our chief industries.

Silly Gimp was on hand the following morning when the school bell rang. But he didn't

stick around very long. Excited over his grandfather's abrupt disappearance and the impending injunction he asked to be excused, as he was needed, he said, to help run the hinge factory. I think the kid was worried. But he's such a big bluffer it's hard to tell what his feelings really are. He and Marjorie Van Ness staged a very pathetic little scene in the music room as he broke the news to her, à la sheik fashion, that she was going to be denied the usual treat of feasting her appreciative eyes on his studious form. But business was business, he said, with a sort of grown-up gesture. Marjorie reminded him then of her coming party. That was one time, she told him, when he mustn't let business interfere with pleasure. For the party would be *most* incomplete, she said, unless he was there to play a piano solo. And now that he had taken a course of lessons in Chicago (I had heard about him going back and forth on the train), she expected *wonders* of him. All of which was pie and ice cream to Silly. Boy, he loved it.

"And how about Jerry and I?" Poppy put in jokingly, figuring, I guess, that it would be fun to get Silly jealous. "Don't you want us to play for you, Marjorie?"

Silly gave one of his particularly mean laughs. *"You?"* he sneered. "Say, Unconscious, you couldn't play tiddledy winks."

"You'd be surprised," beamed Poppy, "if you once heard me."

"Yah, I would be surprised, all right, if I ever heard *you* play a tune. You don't know a note from a load of hay."

"Do you?" purred Poppy, with dancing eyes.

Silly sort of pushed out his chest.

"Look up my record," says he, "in the Chicago Academy of Music."

"Please don't quarrel," says Marjorie, who probably would have been thrilled if they had started biffing each other around. "Of course, Poppy and Jerry can play a piece for me if they want to."

"*Them* play!" Silly further sneered at us. "Haw! haw! haw! That's funny. Now let me tell one."

Boys as a rule don't care very much about piano music. That's mostly stuff for girls. But I kind of wished then that I did know how to tickle the keys of a piano. For I could imagine how Silly would show off at the coming party. Those trips to Chicago hadn't cramped his conceit any. And it was galling to me to think that I would have to sit back and look on. But wait until I tell you about the stunt that Poppy pulled that night. *Laugh?* Say, the fellows almost died. For Silly's boy friends aren't so many, let me tell you.

The school kids realized, of course, that any party gotten up by Marjorie would be a big event. For she's that kind. So a lot of talk was passed around between classes. And did Red ever get sore when Bid Strickler kidded him about taking the pug-nosed Smalley girl. It was a mean crack for Bid to make. For Mildred Smalley is a nice kid, even though her nose does turn up. But having been snubbed, Bid felt sore. As though anybody *would* invite him to a nice party, the big crumb!

Later Red told me confidentially (and kind of mysterious-like, too) that his folks were expecting company from Hollywood, California. It would pay me, he said, to wait a day or two before I picked a partner. Which stirred up my curiosity. But when I asked him what he meant he laughed and ran away.

He needn't have worried, though, about *me* picking a partner for the party. Gosh! The bare thought of it gave me cold chills. Still, Mother told me that noon that I should do my duty as a little gentleman. There were many nice girls in our block, she said. And it was a growing boy's opportunity to be courteous to the opposite sex. That's what the knights of old did. And that was the way of the world.

A fellow can talk frankly to his mother.

Which, I guess, is the main reason why mothers are so dear to us.

"But what am I supposed to do?" says I uneasily, referring to my partner. "Kiss her in the dark?"

"What nonsense!" Mother spoke sharply. "Of course you aren't supposed to kiss her. Just be nice to her. Talk to her about things that are of general interest to boys and girls of your age. And when the party is over see that she gets home safely."

"Do you suppose Dad will let me borrow the car?" says I eagerly.

"That isn't improbable. Certainly, if you pick out a nice neighbor girl, as I suggest, your father and I will want to do all we can to further your evening's enjoyment. For we realize, Jerry, that you're growing up."

I liked the thought, all right, of driving the car. But that girl business! Ouch! It was a good thing, I concluded, ending the meal with a grand spurt as I heard Red out in front spitting over our yellow rosebush, that I had several days in which to buck up my courage.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PRANCING PANCAKE

I FOUND Red nursing a skinned nose.

"It's all your fault," he growled at me.

"Did Aunt Pansy fire her pancake at you?" I grinned.

"No," he bit off the word grumpily. "But she kicked me in the face with one of her shoes."

He had hidden under his weighty relative's bed, he told me, to sort of spy on her in proper detective style, as instructed. Everything was lovely until she started taking off her shoes. They kind of stuck to her fat feet. So she gave an impatient kick . . . the luckless detective's exposed nose and the loosened shoe sort of coming together with a hilarious smack. After which, as he let out a gooey squawk, she indignantly prodded him out of his hole with a husky curtain pole.

"Boy," he wound up, feeling of his rear end, "she's hard. And *can she punch!* So if you and Poppy want any more detecting done in that quarter you can do it yourself."

"Shucks!" I tried to cheer him up. "You mustn't be a quitter, Red. Be a hero."

"I'll be a wreck," he staggered weakly, "if she gets another crack at me. Boy, did that shoe ever sting! And how lovely if I have to lead the parade next Wednesday with a gob of court-plaster on my beak. . . . Can't you and that smart chum of yours," he shoved out another scowl, "think of something else to get me into trouble?"

Asked then if his aunt had said anything about old Cap'n Tinkertop, he shook his head.

"Why should she?" he inquired in turn.

"Their stores are close together," says I. "And the thought just came to me that possibly she picked up the pancake idea from him."

"How is he?" Red then inquired, sharing my affection for the unfortunate old man.

"Just about the same, so I hear. And the other geezer, too."

It never occurred to the freckled one to ask if I had found out who the pancake geezer really was. Nor did I bring up the subject, it having been agreed between the leader and I that we were to keep shut on the old man's secret until he was able to speak in his own defense. At which time, of course, if he was on the square, we'd do everything we could to help him, calling on the other fellows as they were needed.

Having been excused, like Silly, Poppy spent the afternoon at the old mill, first repairing the bridge and then working inside. He had learned a lot, he told me, his eyes shining happily, when I joined him after school.

The mill, usually so quiet and tomb-like, was now a place of queer rumbling, grumbling sounds. Even the floor shook. And as I cheerfully joined the miller and his young assistant in their work I found myself wondering where old Davey was. Certainly, I concluded, as the machinery's ceaseless rumble beat against my ears, he'd be out of luck if he got tangled up in the big water wheel, which creaked and groaned, like a tortured giant, as the rushing water forced it to perform its work. Earlier, Poppy told me, as he and I weighed up the compounded flour in five-pound paper bags of which there was a good stock on hand, Silly, in pattern of his arrogant grandparent, had tried to cut off the miller's water supply. But the old man's new courage and determination had stood him in good stead. So all day long, Silly having been defied, the huge water wheel with its accompanying machinery, some of it more than a hundred years old, had creaked and groaned.

Good kid that she is, and generous to the core, Bobs wanted us to stay to supper. But there was no sense in putting her to extra work. In

fact, with the patient on her hands, she was doing too much. So we told her, after a brief trip to the sick room, where I was shown the mole on the patient's right elbow, that we'd eat supper at home as usual.

"What does Doc Leland say about the case?" Poppy inquired when we were leaving, having first given ourselves a good brushing. For flour milling, let me tell you, is blamed dusty work.

Bobs looked troubled.

"Dr. Leland seldom talks about his patients. And sometimes I—I fear that the old man never will get well. For he just lays there like a corpse hour after hour. At times I can scarcely hear him breathe. Oh," an emotional note came into her voice, "I wish I knew who he was. For he surely belongs to someone. And his people should be notified of his illness."

"You seem to like him," says Poppy quietly, after a quick look in my direction.

"I pity him. And I can't make myself believe that he's wicked. Somehow he—he makes me think of Granddad."

"In what way?" Poppy inquired in continued quietness.

"Oh," she gave a nervous gesture. "I can't explain it. It's just a—a sort of feeling."

Kinship, either known or unknown, has its definite, enduring ties. No one can deny that.

And Bobs' feeling for the sick man was conclusive proof to us of his true identity. But until he was able to speak for himself, as I say, it was our intention to keep the secret to ourselves.

It was Bobs' story that Bill Hadley called her up several times a day to inquire about the patient. And this persistence of the marshal's kind of worried us. For we knew what was going on in his mind. But with the job on our hands of selling the compounded flour that the miller was now turning out in hundred-pound lots (each hundred pounds was compounded separately), we quickly turned our thoughts into more creative channels.

"And when do you start twisting the tail of this wonderful merchandising scheme of yours?" says I, when the leader and I were headed for home.

"Give me time, Jerry."

I drew a deep breath.

"I'm glad, Poppy," says I, as a picture of the growing stacks of buckwheat flour rose up in my mind, "that it's your responsibility instead of mine."

"It *is* a responsibility," he acknowledged gravely. "I'm beginning to feel it."

This was the first time I'd ever seen him act that way. Usually he's chockful of ideas. And self-confidence, too.

"Crickets, Poppy!" I cried, in growing alarm. "You aren't losing your nerve, are you?"

"I hope not," he laughed, kind of uneasy-like. "But it's a blamed big job, Jerry. I hardly know where to start in."

But Fate, seemingly so unfair with the old Cap'n and his seafaring friend, was our ally. A cold wave, the radio announced that night, was sweeping down from the north. Which promptly put an idea into Poppy's head. Instead of buying ice-cream cones, he said, with growing enthusiasm, the thousands of band students who were scheduled to arrive in town Wednesday morning, would much prefer pancakes and maple syrup. For what could taste better on a cold day, be it May or December, the enthusiastic leader got in some of his big gestures, than a plate of Gimp's piping hot buckwheat pancakes? Um-yum-yum!

So we got permission of the mayor to build a big pancake stand at the corner of Main and Hill Streets. Nor did we have to buy any lumber, the dealer having agreed to rent it to us for five bucks, with the understanding, of course, that the boards would be returned in good condition. The whole gang was in on the scheme, Rory included. And full of enthusiasm we had the time of our lives putting up that stand, to roof which we used an old red-and-white awning. We fixed up things kind of fancy-like, too, ran-

sacking our attics for bunting and similar truck. Having provided a place in the middle of the stand for our oil stove we had counters and seats on all four sides. Forty customers could load up at once. And what hungry boy, we agreed, as we enthusiastically talked over our prospects, couldn't eat at last fifty cents' worth of pancakes? For these, we were constantly reminded by the starry-eyed leader, were going to be unusual pancakes. Pancakes with a lingering taste! Pancakes with a skin you love to touch! Pancakes with a schoolgirl complexion! Pancakes mellow and pancakes sweet. Pancakes tidy and pancakes neat. Yah, he even spouted to us in poetry. All we heard that busy Tuesday (and, bu-lieve me, with band practice, school and everything else, it was a busy day) was pancakes, pancakes, pancakes. All trimmed up beautifully with good creamery butter and swimming in pure maple syrup. The syrup in particular would cost us a lot of jack. We realized that, all right. But, as Poppy said, we wouldn't gain much (in the way of building up an increased demand for the miller's product which, after all, was the chief thing that we had in mind) if we let the thousands of expected tooters and drummers go home without the pancake habit. And to make that habit a certainty we simply had to have the best pancakes and the best trimmings that money could buy.

The busiest kid you ever set eyes on, Poppy further rigged up a big flour bin built in the shape of a carton such as the ones (Aunt Jemima, for instance) that you see in grocery stores.

"I want the pancake eaters to remember this carton," he told us, between jumps. "For we're going to use it in our business. And when the coming visitors see it in their dealers' stores, later on, I want them to instantly associate it with the good pancakes that they got here."

Gimp's Fancy Mixture! That name, as the leader had painted it on the carton-shaped flour bin, didn't look so hot to me. And taking him aside I told him so.

"Put the old beezer to work, Poppy," says I. "You can think up a better name than that. Get something peppy. Something that the kids will notice and remember."

And did he? I hope to snicker. Arriving at the stand bright and early Wednesday morning, eager to get things started—for it wasn't to be doubted that a big day's work lay ahead of us—I found that the clever leader had repainted the big advertising carton. Gimp's Fancy Mixture had been changed to Gimp's Prancing Pancake Flour. And on all four sides of the stand was the same name:

THE PRANCING PANCAKE

CHAPTER XV

BR-R-R-R!

MAY usually is a hot month down our way. And do the days ever drag as we sit wearily in school, so close to the beginning of the looked-for summer vacation, and dream of the good old swimming hole with its colony of hungry blood-suckers and snoopy snakes. And do we ever get socked with a ruler, too, when the teacher catches us dreaming. Ouch!

But, bu-lieve me, I had no swimming hole dreams to-day. I guess not. For it was regular December weather. Br-r-r-r! And the visitors who probably had earlier dreaded the thought of wearing their stuffy, high-necked band uniforms were wishing now, as they arrived by the car load from all directions, hundreds and hundreds of them, that they had worn their overcoats. They chased up and down the streets in droves with red noses and shivery spines, having a good time, of course, as boys and girls always do when they get together. But it was plain to

be seen from their actions that they weren't very comfortable.

And did they ever heehaw at the ice-cream sellers. For don't get the idea that ours was the only stand in the streets. Not by a long shot. This was a big day for Tutter, let me tell you. And practically every local association and organization was represented in some way or another. Right across the street from us was the G.A.R. stand, where a handful of shivering, gray-haired old ladies were offering everything from pink lollipops to hand-crocheted rag rugs. There were pop stands and hamburger stands and souvenir stands. Stands here and stands there. But few, if any, were more cleverly fixed up than ours.

Certainly, our stand had the most striking name. THE PRANCING PANCAKE! There was constant laughter from the throng as the young visitors stopped to give us the once over. Nor was the name of our stand any funnier to them, I dare say, than Red's gab. Boy, you should have heard that kid! For he sure loves to show off. Picking off some of the leader's fancy oratory he spouted by the ream about pancakes with a lingering taste—pancakes that the babies cried for and the old maids sighed for. But the crowd as yet had no appetite for pancakes. Having just struck town they were curious to see what

the burg was like. Which was fine for us. For we had to play in the band at nine o'clock. That is when the big parade formed. And that is when our uniformed drum major, with his fancy plumed hat and shiny baton, pulled off those juggling tricks that the town probably will never forget. Due to his clever gymnastics we got the biggest hand, from the shivering spectators, of any band in the parade—and when I tell you that almost one hundred bands were represented, I guess you'll agree with me that it was *some* parade. Certainly, there was plenty of music! Later the visiting bands played separately in the high school auditorium. Our band did its stunt at ten thirty. But being new at the game we lost by a mile. Which, though, wasn't anything to worry about. For we learned a lot by listening to the others. And that was the big idea of the tournament.

Still, I'll always feel sorry that there wasn't a prize for the best drum major. For did little old redhead ever strut his stuff that day. He sure heaped glory on himself. Boy, oh, boy! Wearing her winter coat, his mother was so proud of him that she even cried all over her fur collar. And when anybody can cry over him I guess that's going some.

Well, as soon as our band director dismissed us we beat it for the pancake stand where Peg,

the only one in our gang who doesn't play an instrument, was in charge. We could smell pancakes before we turned the corner. Um-yum-yum! And when we got there, our big chum, with a chef's cap on his head, was jiggling out Prancing Pancakes as fast as our borrowed oil stove would cook them. To my surprise Bobs was there, too. As busy as a bee. And I don't mind telling you that she gave me a particularly warm smile as the five of us, Red, Rory, Scoop, Poppy and myself, tumbled pell-mell into the stand, eager to get to work.

"Grandad is taking care of the patient," she told me, as she rushed a fresh supply of pancakes to a clamoring customer who evidently had left home without his breakfast.

It was on the end of my tongue to tell her that the other girls would laugh at her if they saw her working in a stand with six boys. But I kept shut. For I saw that she wanted to help us, having figured out, I guess, why we were doing it. And it wasn't right to disappoint her, good kid that she was.

"As though *I* care a rap what the other girls are liable to say about me," she independently turned up her tanned nose, having cleverly read my thoughts.

Poppy backed up to me asking me to tie the strings of his white apron.

"If they make any wise cracks," he told Bobs laughingly, "sock then in the face with a pancake."

The rest of us had aprons, too. And like Peg we all had white caps. For, as I have mentioned, this was a classy outfit. Nor were the visitors very long finding out that we had the best eats in town, though the churches and restaurants did a thriving business. Mother told me afterwards that the Methodist ladies dished out more than four hundred steaming hot dinners in the church parlors. Those in charge of the tournament had anticipated this heavy demand for food. And arrangements had been made accordingly with the various church societies. But boys and girls don't confine their eating to regular meal hours. And it would be a big help, the mayor figured, to have plenty of stands in the streets. Then everybody would get plenty to eat. And what boy or girl would consider an affair of this kind a success if he had to kiss it good-by with an empty stomach?

But the poor ice-cream men! Boy, they didn't take in enough jack that morning to buy low-cut vests for their wives' canaries. And patterning after our success, some of them switched from ice cream to pancakes late in the afternoon, the weather man having predicted that the second day of the tournament would be even colder. But

you can't fool a bunch of boys. Not on the eating truck. And the noisy gang thronging the streets soon found out who had the best pancakes. We had the best trimmings, too. And we baked our pancakes nice and thick, only one old lady who had hard work straddling our bench almost died when she bit into one of Red's pancakes and uncovered a hunk of chewing gum. Which abruptly ended his career at the griddle. For Poppy was good and sore. And getting huffy in turn Red pushed up his skinned nose and marched over to the G.A.R. stand, offering his valuable services free. For he had found out that they were selling homemade doughnuts. But they soon got rid of him when they saw their pile of doughnuts going down, after which he came back to us, begging for pancakes, threatening, if we didn't cough up, to tell the people that we greased our griddles with yellow caterpillars.

A fellow like that ought to have his neck broke. But he was one of our gang. So we gave in to him. After which he really made himself useful.

Starting with one oil stove we lugged in another, with four burners, early in the afternoon. We got more griddles, too. And after a few hours' practice our three chefs, Peg, Poppy and Scoop, got so expert tossing pancakes around that

they stopped the traffic, so eager were the passers-by to see the free show. The best of the three, Peg could even toss a pancake over his shoulder and catch it—only once he missed (it was a soft pancake, too) and socked Bid Stricker in the mug, which may not have been an accident after all. Hanging around, and watching us with jealous, envious eyes, Bid and his gang would have enjoyed nothing better than to start a rough-house. But they knew that the mayor was on our side. So they sensibly left us alone. Anyway, what we could have done to them with that big crock of batter! Oh, baby! It was Red's job now to keep the crock full, drawing the needed flour from the fancy bin that Poppy had made. Nor did we mix the batter with water. I guess not. We used milk, and lots of it. In fact when Red wasn't slopping in the crock he was kept busy running around for supplies.

Passing by, Silly stopped to turn up his nose at us, having discovered, I guess, that he could separate himself from the hinge factory for several minutes at a time without the dam caving in.

"Here you are," cried Poppy, largely for the newcomer's benefit. "Right over here, folks. We're still bakin' 'em. Those delicious pan-browned hand-embroidered pancakes with the lasting, lingering taste. Gimp's Prancing Pan-

cakes! Not ordinary pancakes, but *Gimp's.* Something new and something better. The pancakes that give you pep and ginger. That's how they get their name. They're as good as they look, folks. So step up and enjoy the treat of your lives. Notice how thick they are. Look at 'em! Look at 'em! Look at 'em! And you get three as big as grandpa's bald spot, all soused in pure maple syrup, for only two bits, a quarter of a dollar."

Silly's curiosity was aroused. And having heard this "Prancing Pancake" lingo (which may have turned his thoughts back to the night that his grandparent had spoken so favorably of the other brother's milling business), he kind of stuck around, edging closer and closer.

"I'll take some," he finally flopped a quarter on the counter.

"Burn 'em," Red hissed to Poppy.

But the leader was fair, telling us that Silly's money was just as good as anybody else's. And the pancakes were baked and served in top-notch style.

Then along came a trio of Tutter girls.

"Oh, look!" giggled Minnie Bracket. "Here's Sylvester all by himself."

"And he's eating pancakes," chimed in Elsie Hamm.

"*Prancing* Pancakes," supplemented the third.

"Are they good?" inquired Minnie, sort of leaning over Silly's shoulder.

"Fair," he admitted grudgingly. Then, remembering his manners, he invited the girls to join him.

So they all sat down (as close to the hero as they could get) and he grandly placed the order. Nor would I have paid any further attention to their gab if I hadn't overheard Bobs' name.

"Is she your cousin?" Minnie inquired of Silly.

"If she is," his face reddened, "I'm ashamed to admit it."

"She certainly doesn't look like you."

"Thanks."

"Are you still running your grandfather's factory?" Minnie further inquired.

"Sure thing. I'm the whole works out there."

And did her eyes ever adore him as they looked at him.

"Our busy little business man!" she cooed.

Suffering cats! I almost heaved up something.

"Have some more syrup," I slapped the pitcher at them, "and shut up."

Minnie looked at me and laughed.

"I know now who Jerry's going to take to the party Friday night."

"Who?" the other girls spoke together.

"Grandpa's wildcat."

And then was there ever a frightened squeal from the trio as pancakes began flying by their heads! For Bobs was furious. Considering her temper, the wonder to me is that she didn't shower them with syrup. Nor would we have cared a rap if she had, even if it did cost us two dollars and eighty cents a gallon. For Minnie and her clique were getting exactly what they deserved.

"You *are* a wildcat," the leader cried, angered by the attack. "You look like a wildcat and you act like a wildcat. So it's no wonder the boys ignore you. No girl who cared anything for her reputation would work in a *pancake* stand with *six* boys. But, of course, *you* would."

"Come," says Silly, leading the trio away. "We'll tell the mayor about this and have the dump closed."

But if he did complain to the mayor we never heard anything about it. As for Bobs, I noticed a few minutes later that she had disappeared. So had the funny little hat that I had seen under the counter. And Red told me, as he licked the outside of the syrup pitcher, that he had seen her wiping her eyes. The poor kid! I sort of made up my mind then that I'd take her to the party myself. I'd show that smart Minnie Bracket a thing or two. Still, I kind

of held off, I wouldn't want the boys to make fun of me.

I hardly knew what to do.

Oh, yes, I almost forgot to mention the two bits that we collected from J. Mortimer Potts, who figured, I guess, in stopping to patronize us, that he was contributing to some worthy school cause. A sort of donation. But he got a pleasant surpise when he bit into one of Poppy's crinkly edged masterpieces. Hurrying away, he came back with the two long-faced lawyers, his second bill setting him back a dollar and fifty cents.

"Very fine pancakes," he told us, when he got up to leave. "Very fine indeed. Don't you think so, Mr. Jenkins?"

"Yes, indeed," says Mr. Jenkins, pulling down his vest.

"And what is your opinion, Mr. Reed?"

"Very fine," says Mr. Reed. "Very fine indeed."

They seemed like a fairly decent bunch after all. Still, I felt kind of stiff toward them, realizing that the town wouldn't gain anything by their visit.

"I wonder how they're coming with their injunction?" says Poppy, as the trio disappeared into the lively throng.

"I understand," says I, "that they're still waiting for old Gimlet to show up."

Poppy laughed.

"J. Mortimer ought to be tipped off that his intended victim is hiding in the old mill. Then, rich man that he is, he could buy the mill and tear it down."

"Getting victim and treasure both, huh?" I laughed in pattern, realizing, of course, that the leader's suggestion was just a joke.

"I think we'll find," Poppy then spoke earnestly "that the only treasure in the old mill is its owner's secret pancake formula."

And thus the day carried on, with the hilarious visitors, toward evening, forming parades of their own. Such crazy stunts as they pulled off! And such crazy music! Fifty or more drums all banging at once, and truck like that. Too busy to go home we ate our own stuff. And we liked it, too. But the job got tiresome as evening advanced. So shortly after nine o'clock we put out our fires and checked up, the leader telling us happily that we had cleared one hundred and fifteen dollars.

Which, I thought to myself, as I legged it for home, was a fine start toward popularizing Gimp's Prancing Pancakes. And what a bully good name that was! Further, what a bully good pal I had in the bully good boy who had thought up that bully good name!

After which, tumbling into bed, I enjoyed some bully good sleep.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PANCAKE DUEL

"WELL," Dad shoved a chummy grin at me across the breakfast table the following morning, Mother having gotten up a bit earlier than usual to accommodate me, "how are the Prancing Pancakes coming along?"

"Fine and dandy," I told him.

"All set for another big day, huh?" he further grinned.

"Absolutely," I put spirit into the word.

"How much did you make yesterday?" he then inquired, regarding me curiously.

"Over a hundred dollars."

"Clear of expenses?" he showed considerable surprise.

"Sure thing," I nodded.

"Well," he laughed, "it certainly was a lucky thing for you that the weather man dished out this North Pole stuff. Br-r-r-r! If it keeps up I'm going to start a coal fire in the furnace."

One time in Sunday school the minister told us that God always looks out for the boys and

girls. Which, I thought at the time, was a pretty hefty job. And I couldn't quite figure out how He managed it. But I saw now, as I buttered my toast, that He had an even bigger job than I had suspected. For He looked out for the grown-up people, too. He was on the miller's side, like us. And He had sent the cold weather here to help us.

"Is it true," Mother then spoke up, "that Barbara Gimp threw a pancake in Minnie Bracket's face?"

I stiffened.

"Don't blame Bobs," I spoke quickly in my friend's defense. "For Minnie, the big smart aleck, got exactly what she deserved."

"What happened?" says Mother curiously.

Then, getting my story, she, too, sort of stiffened.

"When I hear of things like this I feel ashamed of my kind," she spoke heatedly. "It's beyond me how girls from supposedly good homes can be so thoughtless in their remarks and so cruel. Barbara is a good child. She has a heart of gold. Nor would she be so plain if she gave her hair and complexion the necessary care. I wouldn't trade her for a dozen girls like Minnie Bracket."

"I understand," says Dad, looking at me, "that

you kids are going to have a big party to-morrow night."

"Sure thing," I nodded. "Marjorie Van Ness is getting it up. It's her birthday."

"And is she another one," says Mother, still kind of worked up, "who thinks it's smart to poke fun at girls less fortunate than herself?"

"Marjorie?" says I quickly. "Oh, no! She's all right."

Asked then if I had decided on a partner for the coming party I sort of squirmed in my chair.

"I suppose it's my duty," says I, "to take Bobs. But I sure hope the fellows won't razz me about it."

"Why don't you fish for bigger game?" says Dad.

"Meaning which?" says I.

"Why not ask Marjorie, herself?"

I laughed.

"As though she'd waste a whole evening on *me!* She likes me, of course. And she's a good kid, as I say. But she has a lot of grown-up ideas. And Silly Gimp, with his lordly ways and fat pocketbook, fits into the picture a whole lot better than me."

Mother had a thoughtful look on her face.

"I wonder," says she, "if Barbara would go to the party if I fixed up a suitable dress for

her. The poor child! I'd like to see her have some fun for once in her life."

I sort of gritted my teeth, the way a fellow does when he faces an unpleasant task.

"You ask her," says I. "And tell her that I want her to go with me. I mean it, too."

"But shouldn't you ask her yourself, Jerry?"

"I will if I see her," says I. "But this is going to be a blamed busy day. And the party's to-morrow night."

"Mother and I were just wondering," says Dad, "if you'd be likely to need the car. If so, I'll leave it downtown to-morrow afternoon and have it cleaned and polished."

Somehow a sort of mist got into my eyes as I looked at him across the table, good old pal that he was, and, as I say, the best dad in the whole state.

"You're peachy, Dad," says I feelingly. Which, I figured, was all I needed to say. For he understood. He and I are that way. Sometimes I kind of shiver as I look ahead. I want to grow up. All boys do. For somehow we can't get the notion out of our heads that the biggest and best fun in life lies ahead of us. But as I grow up I don't want to grow away from my good old Dad. No, indeed. If I had felt ahead of me I think I'd pray to be a boy, just as

I am now, all the rest of my life. Which is kind of silly stuff for me to write down. For I know that I've got to grow up, like the skunks in the forest and everything else that is a part of nature. But I guess you understand what I mean. I love my dad. And I always want to have him in my heart just as I have him now. That's why I keep myself clean and truthful and on the square. For he's that way. And I know it'll make him mighty happy if I follow in his footsteps.

Mother had turned over our spare bedroom to a couple of Steam Corners flute players. But they didn't get up till after eight o'clock. So I never even got to look at them, Poppy having told us to be at the stand at seven o'clock sharp. Nor did we open up a minute too soon.

"Pancakes! Pancakes! Pancakes!" the crowd clamored, as they gathered around the stand. "Shove us some more of those hand-embroidered Prancing Pancakes with the lingering taste. And see if you can't do a little prancing yourselves. Service! Service! Step on it, gang."

So we shoved out the pancakes as fast as we could bake them, our whole outfit having showed up at the appointed time, even Red, who told us, as he sat on a nail keg and rubbed his stom-

ach, that he had a very queer hairy feeling inside of him.

"What happened after you went to bed last night?" quizzed Peg, as expert as ever with his pancake turner. "Did you chaw a hole in your hair mattress?"

"Maybe he lunched on his aunt's hairbrush," was Poppy's laughing contribution, it being our scheme to crowd as much fun into our work as possible.

Red gave us a look that made me think of a forsaken cow sinking to its death in a stinking mud hole.

"I think I'll rest my stomach to-day," says he, wan-like.

Peg let on that he was fainting.

"Ye gods and pickled catfish!" gurgled old hefty, clutching his head. "Now I know that the world *is* coming to an end. Quick! Shove me the camphor bottle."

We had been so busy dishing out Prancing Pancakes that we hadn't noticed the change that had taken place in the G.A.R. stand, the old ladies, I guess, having found the weather too severe for them. But did we ever stare now, and did we ever feel sore, when we caught the sound of Bid Stricker's lusty yap, he and his crummy gang, it seems, galled by our great suc-

cess as they had earlier watched us rake in the jack, having taken the stand over.

"Right this way, folks," Bid ballyhooed for business. "You don't have to eat dyspepsia tablets with our pancakes. Who wants Prancing Pancakes, anyway? For everybody knows that you can's make a pancake prance unless you put fleas in it. Don't be fooled, folks. You'll be glad we opened up when you get a taste of *our* pancakes. For we've got the best pancakes on the street. And you get more for your money here, too."

Wough! Red showed no signs of sickness now. Like a bull with a red flag in front of him, he was ready for battle.

"Shut up, you big bum," he screeched across the street, having climbed onto our counter the better to see over the heads of the laughing throng that milled between the rival pancake stands. "If you don't, I'll come over there and jar the pyorrhea out of your back teeth."

"Hear that, folks?" Bid turned to the crowd. "He even admits that those sick-looking pancakes of his with the languishing lumps are full of pyorrhea germs."

"You'll be full of bruises," Red further screeched, "if you don't dry up."

"Don't mind him, folks," says Bid. "He fell out of bed when he was a baby and landed on his head."

"Are you sure he didn't land head down in a bottle of red ink?" someone laughed.

The freckled one was mad enough now to fight crocodiles.

"Come on," he cried to us. "Let's go over there and choke them to death with their own rotten pancakes."

"Anybody *would* choke," says Bid, "and gag, too, if they ate your pancakes. Why don't you call your stand the Fluttering Flea and have done with it?"

"Come on," Red further urged us to start a fight. But Poppy told him to shut up. Nothing would be gained by fighting, the leader said. As for Bid's insults—let him rave. Every knock was a boost. For the crowd knew, all right, who had the best goods.

And what a jolly, skylarking crowd it was. They were out for fun. And having heard the gabby ruck-a-tuck between our red-headed spitfire and his pancake rival, they now suggested, jokingly, that the two fight it out with their own goods.

"A pancake duel!" the suggestion was quickly picked up. "That's the stuff! Fight it out with your own pancakes. And the fellow who has the best pancakes wins."

"Hot dog!" cried Red. "Bake some big thick ones, Peg. And fill 'em with railroad spikes."

"I'll generously put arnica in mine," swaggered Bid. "For you'll need it, Unconscious, when my ammunition begins to bounce around that under-developed hat rack of yours."

"Boy," Red shot back, "if I ever miss your number eleven mouth it'll be a wonder."

"If you prefer calla lilies to turnip tops," Bid further stepped around, "you'd better put your wishes in writing."

"Hurry up with those pancakes," Red yelled at us.

"Here they are," says Peg, as eager as the rest of us, the crowd included, to see the fun. "But for Pete's sake watch your aim. We'll be disgraced for life if he knocks you out."

"Don't worry," says Red confidently. "I haven't been jiggling that baton six hours a day for nothing."

There was some low talk then, Peg telling the impatient duelist that the last pancake on the plate had a syrup jug cover in it.

"Plaster him," was old hefty's final advice. "And then knock him out."

"Oh, baby!" cried Red. "What a beautiful funeral there's going to be in the Stricker neighborhood. Even the cats will mourn."

So David and Goliath, as you might say (for Bid was much the biggest), got into position, about twenty feet apart. The referee said "go."

And then did the pancakes ever fly. *Laugh?* Say, I thought I'd bust.

"Yah," screeched Red, as he cranked up his right arm for a particularly effective shot, "you better cover up your face, you cross-eyed scarecrow. The more of it you cover up the better it looks."

"Haw! haw! haw!" jeered Bid, as Red then got a smack in his own mug.

"Don't back down," we cried hastily. "Dig out your eyes and go for him."

"Haw! haw! haw!" Bid bellowed again, as he got in another bull's-eye.

Red staggered.

"Turn on the lights," he squawked.

"You've got him licked, Bid," screeched the other gang, dancing around their chesty leader. "One more crack like that and you'll have him laid out."

"Oh, Red!" we begged, sickened by the thought of his probable defeat and what it would mean to us. "Please, Red! Be yourself. What's the matter, anyway? Are you going to let that simp lick you?"

"Pepper," gurgled the freckled one, clawing at his face. "Their pancakes are full of it. I've got it in my eyes."

I never saw Peg so excited in all my life. Geeminy crickets! *He* could have ended the scrap

in our favor in two jerks of a lamb's tail. But, of course, he had no right to butt in.

"Grab the syrup jar cover," he cried. "That's it! Now sock him right on the snout."

Which is exactly what Red did. Bid turned a complete back somersault. And did the crowd ever cheer as little David posed, gladiator-fashion, with one foot on his fallen victim.

"Let me up," screeched Bid. "I'll win yet."

But the crowd told him laughingly that the fight was over. Nor did he, during the balance of the day, as he took care of his own trade, make any more mean cracks about our pancakes.

Red went all to pieces after the fight. It was his stomach, he told us, rolling his eyes at us. So, laughing, we told him to go hunt up a horse doctor. Instead he dragged himself home where his mother drained the contents of a castor-oil bottle into him. It was purely a case of too many pancakes, she spoke from experience. But Red maintained stubbornly that the lump inside of him wasn't pancakes. It was something that kept getting bigger and bigger, he said, like a growing mushroom. And it felt hairy. So, afraid that he had a tapeworm, his mother finally called in Doc Leland, who later sent for us, telling us things about the patient at Pirate's Bend that completely flabbergasted us. But before I put that down in my book I want to tell you about our talk with J. Mortimer Potts.

CHAPTER XVII

AN UNEXPECTED SUMMONS

NEVER dreaming that the capitalist had any particular interest in us you can imagine how surprised Poppy and I were to get a note from the important visitor, shortly after eleven o'clock, telling us that he'd like to see us at once in the hotel.

The noon-hour rush would soon be on. So, as the leader and I legged it into the Commercial House, our chief hope was that we wouldn't be kept there very long. We wondered, too, and naturally, what in the world J. Mortimer could want of us.

"Maybe he's going to give us some business," laughed Poppy, as Miss Walters came forward to meet us on the second floor of the hotel, the biggest room of which had been turned into an office, with clicking typewriters in smaller adjoining rooms.

"What kind of business?" I whispered quickly.

"Pancakes," he shoved back in an undertone.

Had we been a delegation from the King of

Siam, himself, the stiff-backed secretary couldn't have led us into her employer's presence with greater ceremony. For that was her way. And what a funny little old duck she was, I thought, with her tight hair, stiff white shirt waist and skimpy black skirt.

"The boys are here, J. Mortimer," she spoke crisply, her words matching her precise movements. And then, having pointed out convenient chairs to us, she sort of evaporated from the room.

As the financier greeted us from his big desk I kind of searched his face, still wondering why we had been sent for. And I was kind of uneasy, too. For he was a big man. And I wasn't used to hobnobbing with millionaires. But his friendly smile sort of reassured me.

"I almost wish," says he, when we were seated in front of him, "that I'd instructed you boys to bring me a big plate of those hand-embroidered pancakes."

"We can quickly get you some," says Poppy, unwilling to let even a single order get away from us.

"Um. . . . Thanks for the offer. But I guess we'd better get down to business without delay. For it seems that I'm always pressed for time. The pancakes can wait. . . . Oh, Miss Walters."

The secretary oozed through a doorway.

"Yes, J. Mortimer."

"You can have the chauffeur perform that errand now, if you wish. Everything's ready."

"Yes, J. Mortimer."

"Have a good day yesterday?" the financier inquired of us.

"Yes, sir," says Poppy, when I nudged him to do the talking.

"I figured you would when I got a taste of your pancakes. For stuff like that is bound to sell, not only here but all over the world, if properly promoted."

"Exactly," says Poppy, speaking in the same businesslike tone of voice. And was I ever proud of him! *My* pal. Few boys, I told myself, with a warm twinkle inside of me, could talk up to big business men that way. But old Poppy could. For he was crammed full of big business ideas himself.

"I understand," the financier continued, "that you're a partner of the old man who runs the mill north of town."

"Not his *real* partner," Poppy corrected.

"What do you mean by that?" the words were spoken tersely.

"I just work for him."

"I was out there this morning. Had quite a long talk with him. And it's his story that you're

back of this scheme to popularize his pancake flour. . . . Did you give it that new name?"

"Jerry and I together."

The big sap!

"Don't you believe him," I hastily told the capitalist. "I had nothing to do with it. The credit's all his."

Yet, I thought, how like Poppy that was! Generous old pal!

A warmer expression came into the eyes of the understanding financier as he regarded us intently.

"One time," he spoke softly, "I had a chum who thought just as much of me as you boys think of each other. That was years and years ago. I cherish the memory in my heart. And I live over again the joys of those early days in my dreams." Then, as the efficient secretary appeared quietly at his elbow, he become once again the terse man of wide affairs. "What is it, Miss Walters?" he inquired sharply.

"Two telegrams, J. Mortimer. The first one is important. I wired them to hold the consignment until further advised. And I raised the commission to forty per cent."

"Quite right, Miss Walters," the speaker studied the yellow slips. "Quite right."

Then, the door having closed noiselessly on

the gliding white waist and skimpy black skirt, the magnate again turned to us.

"Gimp's Prancing Pancake Flour," he repeated the name, sort of turning it over and over in his experienced mind. "Very good. Very good indeed. Striking. Full of action. Easily remembered. Fits the times. A distinct credit to its originator. . . . I hear some very fine reports about you, young man."

I dug my elbow into Poppy's ribs.

"Wake up," I hissed. "He means you."

"Yes, sir," Poppy finally found his voice.

"You're either exceptionally bright or unusually lucky."

"I *am* lucky," Poppy admitted earnestly.

"And bright, too," I chimed in.

"So I am inclined to believe," smiled the financier.

Poppy's face was as red as a beet.

"Oh, shucks!" he growled. "Talk about something else."

The capitalist got down to business again.

"That striking name," says he, "and those delicious pancakes that you dished out to me yesterday hit me right between the eyes. The flour, I learned on inquiry, had been ground in a local mill. So, as I say, I went out there this morning, wanting to get the whole story. A

product like that, I told myself, ought to be on the market. Yet, fond as I am of pancakes, I never had heard of Gimp's flour, either under its old or new name. Went all through the mill with its owner. Heard the whole story of the new partnership. That's why I sent for you."

"But it really isn't a partnership," Poppy corrected. "It's just an agreement, Mr. Potts."

"Nevertheless I've been told by the other party to present my proposition to you."

Proposition! Gosh! That sounded big.

"I think you ought to send for Mr. Gimp," says Poppy uneasily.

"I have sent for him. He's on his way here now in my car. I expect him any minute."

And as though this was her cue the secretary again appeared at his elbow.

"The miller is here, J. Mortimer," she informed crisply.

"Very well, Miss Walters. Show him in."

Poppy sort of stepped between the woman and the door.

"Just a minute," says he, speaking evenly to the financier. "Before you bring Mr. Gimp into the room I'd like to know what this is all about."

"The chief point is," the executive spoke crisply, "that I'm interested in your friend's milling business."

"Evidently," says Poppy quietly, "you must see big possibilities in it."

"Frankly, I do. The majority of my interests, as you may know, are in hardware lines. But I want to get into the food game. And here evidently is a fine chance."

"Does Mr. Gimp know," says Poppy, "that you want to take over his mill?"

"I've made him a proposition."

"Yes?" the door was left open for further explanations.

"If I can get the whole water power I'll equip the mill with brand new machinery from top to bottom. And between us we'll put Gimp's Prancing Pancake Flour on the map."

"And you're quite sure," says Poppy, "that you aren't acquiring the mill to buck the hinge company?"

The two regarded each other intently, one sort of measuring the other. And I fancied that I could see growing admiration in the financier's hard gray eyes.

"That remark, young man, is a credit to your business intelligence. And now that you've shown such a thorough understanding of the situation I'm going to put the cards on the table. This hinge factory of yours is doomed. As soon as its present owner shows up, my lawyers will plaster

an injunction on the plant that will sew it up completely. Gimp either will fight us (to his own ultimate defeat) or sell out to us. There's no other course left open to him. Not that we want his designs. We're satisfied with our own. But we do want his business—the big orders he's getting. By right it's our business anyway, for he's infringing and has for years, as we're in a position to prove. If we take over the factory, as anticipated, we'll lock it up and move the machinery to Chicago, where we have a real plant. Gimp's building is a barn. Hardly fit for kindling wood. So you can see why I have my eyes on the mill. It's possession will give me complete control of the water power, all of which can then be diverted to the older industry. And in time we'll have a plant out there as big as anything that the Aunt Jemima people ever put up or ever intend to put up. For there's great possibilities in that flour of Gimp's. Wonderful possibilities."

"Which is exactly what I told him," says Poppy. "But please tell me, in case the deal goes through, what the miller himself gets out of it?"

"We'll organize a stock company. And upon the delivery of his property, water rights and secret formula to the new company he'll be assigned thirty per cent of the total book stock, which, in a short time, as the business grows, will make him independently wealthy."

There was a dead silence then as Poppy stepped up to the big desk and searched its owner's face. I could see Miss Walters stirring restlessly. For she wasn't used to standing still. But she said nothing. Nor did her employer.

"Mr. Potts," Poppy spoke finally, "would you lie to a boy, who was trying to help an old friend, for personal gain?"

"I wouldn't lie to a *man* for personal gain," the financier squared his shoulders, "much less a boy. I'm a fighter. But I fight fair."

"And it's your intentions," Poppy persisted, "to play fair with old Mr. Gimp?"

"Absolutely."

There was another brief silence.

"I believe you," says Poppy earnestly.

"It's unusual for me," the capitalist then admitted, as everybody sort of relaxed, "to discuss a proposition like this with one of your age. But I could do nothing with the miller himself. He seems to trust you implicitly."

"Which is exactly the reason," says Poppy simply, "why I felt the need of pinning you down, thus getting your promise of a square deal. For you can imagine how unhappy I'd be, Mr. Potts, if things went bad for the miller later on—if you cheated him, I mean," the final words were spoken quietly.

"My business record," the capitalist showed

pride in his achievements, "speaks for itself."

"What do you want me to do?" Poppy then got down to brass tacks. "Urge the miller to sign over his property to you?"

"Oh, no! All I want at present is an option. Then, if I do acquire the complete water power, as anticipated, we can carry out the suggested developments. Otherwise—if I fail, I mean, to get complete control of the dam—I wouldn't care to have the separate mill on my hands."

I could see, all right, why he wanted the mill. He expected to take over the hinge factory. If he locked it up the water power would be wasted. But if he could turn the power into the old mill the investment would sort of pay its way.

"What do you consider such an option ought to be worth?" inquired Poppy.

"A thousand dollars."

"And the miller gets the money if he signs the paper?"

"Certainly."

"But suppose the hinge manufacturer goes to law and beats you?"

"In that case—granting that such a thing *could* happen—I'll sacrifice the amount of the option. The miller will be a thousand dollars ahead."

Satisfied, Poppy let one of his peachy grins crawl around on his face.

"Now that we've come to an understanding, Mr. Potts, I'm going to tell you the truth: I'm tickled pink to have you step in this way, experienced business man that you are. For I realize now that it's no boy's job to put a new pancake flour on the market. I talked big to the miller. For I was sorry for him. And I wanted to cheer him up. But later, as I sort of groped around for a plan, I was scared stiff that I'd make a mess of things. An awful thought to me. Having just met him you can't appreciate what a nice old man the miller is. He wouldn't harm a fly. But that brother of his—the one you're waiting to take a crack at—is a two-legged hog. And it was to upset his plans that Jerry and I chipped in on the miller's side, learning then how destitute the old man really was. He has a granddaughter. And, can you imagine it, Mr. Potts, she had to quit school because she hadn't decent clothes. I like to see people happy. It's my nature, I guess. I like to do things to make people happy. For their happiness brings me happiness. So, with Jerry to help me, I pitched in, dishing out a lot of big talk to the discouraged old man, as I say. He'd soon be rich, I told him. And I believe now that he will be rich, though through no help of mine. The credit will be yours, Mr. Potts. And, to that point, don't you think it would be added credit to you, in case you

do acquire the hinge factory, to continue operations there until you can give the workmen jobs in the mill? For they're going to suffer if you simply throw them out of work. That will give the town a bad opinion of you. It will make it harder for you in the mill, too. For the workmen, lacking confidence in you, won't do their best."

"A very good point," nodded the capitalist. Then he turned to his secretary. "Your notebook, Miss Walters." He dictated a letter, or whatever you want to call it, covering the point that Poppy had brought up. And when the typed paper was brought into the room, as part of the option, Mr. Gimp signed it, as also did its originator.

As you can imagine, the miller was in a daze. So Poppy and I went with him to the bank to deposit the thousand-dollar check that had changed hands in the deal. The poor old man! When told that he had a thousand dollars to his credit he broke down and cried all over the Commercial Bank's new marble counter.

"I—I trust you, Poppy," he murmured, over and over again. "I—I trust you. You're doing for me what my own son would have done if he had lived."

And maybe you think Poppy didn't have a

sober look on his face. For here, as he realized, was added responsibility.

"If the scheme pans out well," he told me, "I'll be the happiest kid in the whole world. But if it fails—if Mr. Gimp loses his mill, I mean, through signing that paper—I'll go crazy."

And now let me tell you what happened at Red's house. Ye gods and pickled catfish, as Peg says. The wonder is that the whole bunch of us didn't go crazy.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FATAL TOUCH

RETURNING to the stand, just as the big tower clock on College Hill donged the noon hour, Poppy and I had to fight our way through the pancake-hungry jam that was clamoring for service. And did Peg and the others ever razz us when we joined them, asking us, kind of sarcastic-like, if we had enjoyed our vacation. That was our last big rush. For the crowd began to thin out in mid-afternoon. So, when supper was over, we flagged a drayman and had our stuff hauled home, the leader estimating that we had cleared about thirty-five dollars apiece, or a total of approximately two hundred and ten dollars. Bid, too, I imagine, had ended up with a nice piece of jack in his pockets, which, however, didn't worry us. For we aren't selfish. When put in his place he had just as much right to sell pancakes as us.

Given Red's share of the profits I dropped in at his house just before dark to pay him off. But Mrs. Meyers wouldn't let me see him. And she kind of jawed at me for letting him make a pig

of himself at the stand, which, I thought, was blamed unreasonable of her. For certainly I couldn't stop him if he wanted to eat. Doc Leland was there, she told me, showing by her nervous actions how upset she was. And it wasn't improbable, I learned, that the patient, who still insisted that something with hair on it was crawling around inside of him, sort of getting bigger and bigger, would have his insides cleaned out with a stomach pump. Then, as a sewer-like gurgle trickled down the stairs from the sick room, she fell limply against the hall tree, almost upsetting it, after which she quickly got control of herself and scooted up the stairs like a hen going to war.

"I'm coming, Donald!" she cried. "I'm coming!"

Was this some new trick of Red's, I wondered, to get his folks all excited over him? Or was he really sick? Certainly, I wasn't goofy enough to swallow that "hair" talk of his. Still, I considered, if there was such a thing as a tapeworm, caused from overeating, I could think of no one who would be more likely to get one than him.

But what was a tapeworm, anyway? Was it like a snake? And did it have hair on it like a cat? Curious now to get the facts I hung around until Doc showed up, noticing, as he swung heavily out of the house and down the

front porch steps, that he looked peculiarly upset.

"Whar's Poppy?" he jerked the words at me, before I could question him.

"Over on Elm Street, I suppose, where he lives."

"I want to see him. And I want to see you, too. So git him an' come to my office without delay."

Gosh! That sounded kind of serious. And a sudden scare began to creep over me.

"Is Red in bad shape, Doc?" I inquired anxiously, a lump forming in my throat as I looked up at the window of my chum's room, which usually has a lot of junk hanging in it.

"Humph! You'll think he's in bad shape when I show you what I jest pumped out of him. The most amazin' case I ever had, bar none. I can't understand it at all. Never heard of anything like it."

Was Red liable to die? The thought sickened me. For I realized then how empty my life would be without him. We're always kidding him when he's around. And sometimes we hand him some pretty hot shots. But that's all in fun. Boy chums choose that way of showing their affection for one another. Now that Red was in trouble I would have waded through fire to help him. I guess yes! With his freckles and everything the thought frequently had stuck in my mind that his

mother must have a mighty strong stomach to kiss him. But I'd even do that, I now told myself, sort of heroic-like, as I lit out for Elm Street, if it would help him.

Getting Poppy, who was home dusting the parlor furniture, the two of us later tumbled into Doc's office in the Emergency Rooms, which is the nearest thing Tutter has at present to a regular hospital. Doc was pacing the floor. And several big medicine books were scattered here and there on chairs and tables. Evidently, I quickly grasped the situation, with a sinking heart, he was trying to figure out what Red had.

But before telling us anything the office owner made us go over the complete story of our early contact with the pancake geezer. We were questioned particularly about the pancake letter and its writer's later references to his bald head. It was his story, we declared, as given to us on the raft, that he had grown a new crop of hair on his bald head through the repeated application of pancakes made of Gimp's Fancy Mixture, the buckwheat flour now known to the local people as Gimp's Prancing Pancake Flour. Then, the new hair had fallen out. So the old man had come to town (we had been told) to buy some more flour.

"He gave us a dollar bill," Poppy wound up, "telling us to get a sack of fresh buckwheat flour

and hang it in a tree near the mill pond. But before we could carry out his instructions he got a biff on the head."

Doc was still pacing up and down the room, occasionally flipping up his coattails in a kind of comical way.

"Um . . ." he wheeled. "You say he specified *fresh* flour?"

"Yes, sir," Poppy nodded.

"He seemed to think," I put in, drawing on my memory, "that if he had used fresh flour in the first place his new hair wouldn't have dropped out."

"Not an easy story to believe," Doc grunted. "Yet, however ridic'lous it sounds, thar must be some truth to it. Fur I discovered this afternoon, when I called on the patient at the mill, that new hair is growin' out all over his head. Hair as black as coal. An' now the Meyers boy's condition has further complicated things."

I thought I'd stare my eyes out. And Poppy, too. For we saw in a flash what Doc was leading up to. There was something queer about old Peter Gimp's compounded pancake flour. A secret formula, he evidently had grown careless in his old age, leaving out something of importance or putting in something that didn't belong there.

It was this change in the mixture, Doc then

told us as he showed us the hunk of hair that he had pumped out of poor Red, that gave the flour its amazing internal and external hair-growing properties. Everything it touched turned to hair, like the fatal touch of King Midas in the fairy story—only, of course, what *he* touched turned to gold.

I thought of the thousands of pancakes that we had dished out in the past two days. And a sort of horror gripped me by the throat.

"What can we do?" I cried, turning helplessly to Doc.

"If thar's a cure fur it," says he, looking doggedly at his scattered reference books, "I'll find it. So give me time. Meanwhile keep your eyes an' ears open. If you find out anything of importance, let me know."

Poppy's wits hadn't wholly deserted him.

"How about the Cap'n?" he cried. "Is there any sign of new hair on his head?"

"As I understand it," says Doc, "his head is all bandaged up."

I thought of Aunt Pansy.

"I never told you, Doc," I put in quickly, "but Red's aunt, who has a bald spot, has been wearing a pancake on her head, too."

Which made the physician look dizzier than ever.

"The next time I go over thar," he finally

found his voice, "I'll take a peek at her. An' I'll question her, too." He then took to pacing the floor again. "A most amazin' complication," he flipped his coattails. "I wonder at times if I'm in my right mind."

Then, as the telephone rang, he waddled into an adjoining room.

"Yes," he grunted, "this is Doc Leland. Huh? What's that? Um . . . I'll be right over."

Bang! went the receiver on its hook. And when he turned to us he had a look in his protruding eyes I can't describe.

"It's that rich man at the hotel. The feller named Potts. He's havin' cramps in his stomach, he says. An' it's his further story that he has a queer hairy feelin' in his mouth."

Poppy clutched his head.

"Sufferin' cats!" he squealed. "Here we are with a cure for bald heads in our possession. But instead of making millions out of it we're liable to all end up in the penitentiary."

"Thar's need of quick work," panted Doc, his eyes now burning with excitement. "Find out all you kin from the miller. Try an' git that secret formula of his'n. An' give his laboratory a downright good searchin'. Whatever you find, bring it to me. Bring me a sample of the flour, too. I'll try to analyze it. An' let's hope fur the best."

CHAPTER XIX

HEADING INTO A WEIRD ADVENTURE

MR. WHEELER'S drug store on Hill Street, as Poppy and I now approached it at a brisk gait after leaving Doc Leland's office, will always be a reminder to me, I guess, of the exciting night that Bingo, our bob-tailed elephant (of whom I have written a complete book), had the stomach ache in Henry Bibbler's barn in Happy Hollow. For it was from the friendly druggist, who gives the biggest sodas for the price of any dealer in town and hence has the biggest juvenile trade, that I borrowed the big rubber bottle sent to him for advertising purposes. We had a hard time that memorable night in curing Bingo's stomach ache, for he had so much of it, his stomach, of course, being ten times as big as ours. And what we would have done without that big water bottle I can't imagine. So I've always been grateful to Mr. Wheeler. And I like to patronize him.

"Let's treat ourselves to a malted milk," I stopped in front of the drug store. "For we've got a long walk ahead of us."

"Check," says Poppy.

So we turned in, having plenty of jack in our pockets. And what was our surprise to find Peg and Rory perched on stools at the marble counter, each with a big gob of decorated ice cream in front of him.

"Hit's a President 'Oover sundae," Rory told us, licking his spoon. "Hit's 'ot, too. You'd better get yourselves one."

"Sure," says a familiar businesslike voice behind the counter. "Let's have your orders, children."

And there was Scoop, all dolled up in a white apron.

"Since when," says I, dropping wearily onto a stool, "did you pick off this job?"

"Oh, I'm just doing Mr. Wheeler a good turn. He's out back mixing up some medicine for old Mrs. Higgins."

"And has *she* got stomach cramps, too?" Poppy put in quickly.

"How did you guess it?" grinned Scoop, as he expertly massaged the counter.

"Hi remember 'er," Rory did a sword-swallowing act with his long-handled spoon. "She's the old lady who dropped 'er false teeth in our syrup jug."

Another victim! Like Poppy, I felt weak.

"Quick!" says I to the grinning soda jerker.

"Mix me up something good and strong."

"How about a carbolic acid phiz?" he joked. Then, getting a closer look at me, he sobered. "For the love of Pete," says he quickly. "What's the matter with you?"

I told him. The whole town, I said, leaning weakly on the counter, was peppered with hairy pancakes. Already enough hair had been pumped out of Red Meyers to stuff a sofa—which was an exaggeration, of course. But I wanted the listeners to realize the seriousness of the situation. That's why I put it good and strong. Soon now, I rattled along, old Mrs. Higgins and everybody else who had bought pancakes from us would be having their stomachs pumped out. Stomach pumping would become Doc's pet specialty, and also the similar specialty of the doctors in the surrounding towns. Or, if the stomach pumps failed to pull the rampant hair out by the roots, other methods would have to be looked up. Gimp's Prancing Pancake Flour, I wound up, had a fatal touch, like old Midas. Everything that the flour came in contact with, inside or outside, turned to hair. And probably at that very moment Doc was putting on a frenzied wheezing pumping act in the rich man's room at the hotel. For he, too, was a victim.

But instead of sharing our excitement Peg, as level-headed as ever, hooted at the idea that we

had unwittingly started an internal hair-growing epidemic. Probably the hair, he said, that had been pumped out of Red was the wig that supposedly had skidded down the Meyers' drain pipe.

"But how did the hair get into Red's stomach?" I squawked.

"One time when I slept with him," says Peg, "I caught him pecking at the buttons on my nightshirt like an old setting hen. And when I jerked him out of his crazy poultry dreams he even searched the bed to make sure that he han't laid an egg. So there's no telling what's liable to get tucked away inside of that kid during his sleep."

"I wish I could believe you," says I weakly.

"Anyway," says Poppy, sort of hoping for the best, I guess, "let's have something to drink."

So Scoop mixed up a couple of malted milks for us. And did he ever make them rich! Um-yum-yum!

"Boy," I smacked, revived already, "I wish you worked here all the time."

"I don't," laughed Mr. Wheeler, coming up behind us.

"A fellow's got to look out for his pals," Scoop sort of excused his extravagance.

"Sure thing," smiled the good-natured druggist. "I always did when I was a boy."

Then, having wrapped up the medicine that he

had compounded for old Mrs. Higgins, he asked us if we'd deliver it to the purchaser on our way home.

"What's it for?" quizzed Peg, shoving the big bottle into his sweater pocket.

"Stomach cramps."

"Did the old lady say anything about having a hairy taste in her mouth?" Peg further inquired.

"No," the druggist shook his head, thinking, I guess, that the question was a rather peculiar one.

I was glad, of course, to learn that there was no hair mixed up in Mrs. Higgins' case. Still, I was worried.

"Oh, forget it," says Peg, when we were outside, Scoop having ditched the white apron. "I ate a big wad of the pancake. And so did each of you fellows. Yet we're all hunky-dory."

"Hi feel hawful full," hiccuped Rory.

"I should think you would," says Scoop, "after eating three of those President 'Oover sundaes."

"Hit wasn't three," corrected Rory, with another hiccup. "Hit was only two, and a horange haid."

The wind having shifted into the south the air was much warmer now. In fact we soon had to unbutton our sweaters. For a brisk walk puts a lot of added heat into a fellow's body.

There was considerable scattered talk as we hurried along in the darkness, having, of course,

delivered the bottle of medicine according to instructions. The treasure theory, we now unanimously agreed, was bunk. It was pancake flour that had brought Sir Hinkle here, and nothing else but. He had told Cap'n Tinkertop about the flour's miraculous hair-growing powers, which explained why the Cap'n, too, had adopted the pancake habit, he, in turn, passing the good news along to Red's aunt. As plain now as A B C. Yet what a complex mess we had made of our earlier theories, even letting ourselves believe that old Davey, himself, was the key to the supposed treasure's hiding place! And we had talked of him lugging the probable sunken treasure to the surface piece by piece! No wonder we were ashamed of our stupidity. Still, having followed my story to this point, can you conscientiously say that you yourself believed the pancake story? I bet you didn't. Like us you probably figured that the story was a sort of blind. The crafty old man had hidden schemes up his sleeve. And he shoved the crazy story at us to throw us off the scent.

"There probably are secret places in the old mill," says Peg, as we continued in the direction of the mill pond with its accompanying dam and separated industries. "And no doubt old Gimlet is hiding there right now. But whether Davey can get into these secret rooms or not he never

was brought here to lug treasure around. That theory was exciting. But it sounds like a bunch of junk now. More probable the turtle is just a pet of the old man's."

"A mighty queer pet, if you were to ask me," says Poppy thoughtfully.

"If I could tame him," added Peg, "I'd like to own him myself."

"I wonder where he is," says Scoop.

"Hi bet 'e's 'idin' in the old mill," says Rory.

"I saw him there," I put in.

Then, as we hurried along, I noticed that the leader was peculiarly quiet. Nor was I surprised when he pulled my sleeve as a signal for me to fall behind.

"What is it?" I inquired quickly.

"I've been thinking about that turtle, Jerry. He may be a pet, as Peg says. But, even so, I can't give up the thought that he was brought here for a secret purpose."

"Yes?" I urged, eager to hear more.

"We know who Sir Hinkle is. And we know in part why he came here, for that pancake talk of his wasn't the hunk of boloney that we thought. He actually came here to buy some of his brother's pancake flour. And with a probable price on his head he intended to keep his identity a secret."

"Yes?" I further urged.

"We thought at one time that he was spying on us through Red's back fence. But I think now that he just happened along. A shower came up. So he sought shelter in the barn. And needing some kind of a name—he didn't dare give his own—he later told us that he was old Sir Hinkle himself. Which may have struck his sense of humor. For I'll always remember how he cackled that morning in the alley when he walked away from us."

"Me, too," says I.

"Raised in this neighborhood, it wasn't hard for him to hide his raft in the reeds. For he knows every foot of the ground around here. He probably knows all about those secret rooms, too. For he was the kind of a fellow to follow up stuff like that. Besides, his father, favoring him, may have told him things. If the rooms were built for a purpose he may even know what that purpose is. And now let us try and figure out what happened here last Saturday night. Old Gimlet, wanting to 'disappear' for reasons known to us, went into the mill. There was a peculiar scream. Someone came out of the mill. We thought it was the hinge manufacturer. But it turned out to be the younger brother, thought by everybody concerned to be dead. Hanged, in fact. And what was the renegade brother doing when he got a biff on the head?"

"Crawling through the miller's kitchen window," says I.

"Exactly. There was something in the house, very probably in the kitchen itself, that he wanted. . . . Make a guess, Jerry."

"Those papers in the kitchen cupboard," says I excitedly.

"And would it be unusual if old Amasa Gimp's original pancake formula was included among those papers?"

"Poppy!" I cried, sort of breathless-like.

"It would seem," the leader went on, in that quiet, probing way of his, "that Rufus Gimp succeeded where hundreds of chemists; during all these years, had failed. He had found a cure for baldness. But he hadn't the formula itself. To capitalize on his probable chance discovery he had to secure the formula. Which is the thing that he was after the night he got biffed."

My head was in a whirl.

"But why did he scream in the mill?" says I. "And if he came here to steal the formula, why didn't he work secretly instead of writing that pancake letter and telling us those things? That sort of exposed his hand. Further, if he passed along the pancake habit to Cap'n Tinkertop, as we now believe, why did the latter go to work for old Gimlet?"

"I'm making no attempt," says Poppy, "to

clear up the whole mystery. Only the two old men themselves can do that."

"And how about the turtle?" says I eagerly.

"I have a theory," says Poppy. "And a very strange theory, too. To prove it or disprove it I've got to see the turtle itself. Or, better still, I'd like to get a picture of it. . . . Do you know anything about flashlight photography, Jerry?"

"Sure thing. I've got a complete outfit at home."

"And would you think that I was trying to impose on you, old pal, if I asked you to go home and get your stuff?"

I heaved a weary sigh.

"It's a long walk, Poppy. But I guess I'd do even more than that for you if you felt that it was necessary."

I could see by his sort of tense, guarded actions that we were heading into something. He had penetrated the cloak of mystery with that keen mind of his. And eager to do my part, come what may, I turned and lit out for home, later heading north again in the continued darkness with two flashlights, a loaded camera, a flashpan (an invention of my own, consisting mainly of an old lard-can cover) and the necessary cartridges.

CHAPTER XX

WHAT THE PICTURE REVEALED

I WAS on the Treebury pike now. I've told you about that road before. It's the lonely road running up Happy Hollow way, past the Bibbler farm and the old Scotch cemetery. Ahead of me, to the right, sort of deep in the hidden hollow, was the sickly yellow light of Henny Bibbler's farmhouse. I could hear the tumbling creek, too, as I came to the spot where Red and Bingo, that memorable night, rolled down the hill.

Later, as you will recall, Bingo's tail disappeared. And having solved this mystery, with its accompanying shivers and giggles, here we were up to our necks in an even spookier mystery. At least it seemed fearfully spooky to me now as I hurried along in the dark, the loaded camera in one hand and the flashpan in the other.

Then, as a car bore down on me from the direction of town, flooding me with light, I stopped, hopeful of getting a ride. Nor was I disappointed.

"Who-o-o!" bawled Bill Hadley, bringing his

old flivver to a clattering stop beside me. "Who-o-o thar, Pegasus. Easy now. Take it easy, you gol-dinged, loose-j'inted ol' gas chewer. You needn't act so pernickety jest because I stopped out here in the country. This here b'y's a friend of mine, he be. An' he wants a ride. So git your tail down an' behave yourself, you fossil-eyed ol' puddle-jumper."

Pegasus! He *would* give his old rattletrap some such big name, I grinned, as I gratefully climbed into the seat beside him. And what comforts that seat provided, even though the upholstering was in tatters! Oh, baby! I felt like a king floating around in a Rolls-Royce.

"You saved my life, Bill," I heaved a thankful sigh.

"Whither bound?" says he jovially, shoving the flivver into high gear. "The ol' mill?"

"Sure thing," I further enjoyed the luxury of my unexpected ride.

"That's whar I'm headin' myself," says he, as Pegasus, after a spiteful jump at a telephone pole, galloped skittishly around a curve on two wheels.

There was nothing in the marshal's manner to suggest that he had been sent for in a hurry. Yet I was kind of worried for a moment or two, wondering if something had happened to my chum.

"Hear about it?" Bill spit through a hole in the dirty windshield.

"What?" says I eagerly.

"The ol' geezer's new hair. It's comin' out all over his head, so Barbara tells me. Jest had a talk with her on the tellyphone."

If we *had* started a "hair" epidemic, as was entirely possible despite Peg's sensible arguments to the contrary, Bill, of course, would soon bring us to account. But I wasn't dumb enough to hurry things along by telling what I knew. So there I sat, as mum as an oyster, the talkative marshal never dreaming, of course, as he told how thick and black old thing-a-ma-bob's hair was, that I was ten times better informed on the local "hair" situation than he was.

Unloading his big mouth a second time he missed the windshield hole by at least three inches.

"Haw! haw! haw!" he bellowed. "Mebbe we better stop an' put on our raincoats."

Boy, we needed raincoats, all right. And rubber boots, too.

"What did Bobs say about the old man?" I then inquired. "Is he any better to-night?"

"Nope," Bill grunted out the word. "An' that's what gits my goat. Fur it hain't perfessional fur me to stall around this way waitin' on him. Still, what kin I do? If he's unconscious I kain't quiz him. An' if he's that sick I sartinly kain't lock him up."

Now that the leader and I had penetrated the secret of the pancake geezer's identity I knew, of course, why the marshal was so eager to make an arrest. There was a possible reward in sight. Nor would he care a rap about the prisoner's final fate if he could once get his mitts on the money.

But *I* wasn't that kind of a detective. I guess not! My sympathies were wholly with the sick man. And I told myself then, as I kind of stiffened in my seat, that I'd cheerfully take big risks if I could save him from the law's clutches.

"Um . . ." says Bill, noticing what I had in my lap. "Bin takin' a pitcher, huh?"

"Poppy's going to take one," I admitted.

Which aroused the older detective's suspicions.

"Whar?" says he quickly, afraid, I guess, that we'd get the start of him. "In the ol' mill?"

"Yes, if that's where the turtle is."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Poppy has a theory," I explained. "And to prove it or disprove it he needs a picture of the turtle. At least that's what he told me."

Thoroughly aroused now, the marshal asked me sharply what else the leader had told me.

"Nothing," says I.

"Come now, Jerry," he sought to corner me. "No evasions."

"What do you want me to do?" says I stiffly. "Make up something?"

"I want you to tell me the truth."

"I'm telling you the truth," I fired back at him. For if there's anything that makes me hot it's to be accused of lying.

"This detective stuff of yours is all right," growled Bill, "as long as you work with me an' tell me what you're doin'. But you're goin' to git yourself in hot water up to your neck, an' them chums of your'n with you, if you start holdin' back on me. Is that plain enough?"

Br-r-r-r! Big bear that he was he thought, of course, that I'd be scared stiff, with wabbly knees and everything else. But I happened to know that I was living in a free country. We owed certain obligations to him, of course. For he represented the law. But that didn't compel us to make a confidant of him. I guess not. Nor did I intend to let him work me, either, with that bull-neck gab of his.

"Well?" says he sharply.

"I heard you," says I.

"Then git busy," he ordered, as he brought the flivver to a stop beside the dam, "an' find out about this here pitcher business. Fur if any flashlight pitchers is goin' to be took here to-night I want to know all about it."

Having caught sight of me Scoop came on the run, telling me hurriedly that Poppy had gone up the creek.

"What for?" says I.

"Search me."

"Did he leave orders for me to follow him?"

"No."

Trailing Bill into the house I saw the new hair myself. It was about an eighth of an inch long and, as Doc had said, as black as coal. Some contrast, I thought, with a peculiar feeling chasing itself around inside of me, to the bald head that we had seen in the alley.

Bobs followed me out of the room.

"I'm not convinced yet," says she, acting kind of bewildered-like, "that it isn't a trick of some kind. For what is there in a buckwheat pancake to make hair grow?"

"Doc Leland thinks," says I, "that your grandfather put something into his buckwheat flour that doesn't belong there, or left something out."

"Yes," she gestured impatiently, "I heard about that from Poppy. But the boys found nothing in Granddad's laboratory except the bran that he uses, and stuff like that."

Tiptoeing to the door of the sick room I surprised Bill bending over the bed.

"Rufus!" he whispered in the patient's ear.

"Rufus! Open your eyes. Look at me. It's Bill Hadley."

"His name isn't Rufus," I told the marshal, who, as you can imagine, looked kind of silly when he turned and found me standing in the doorway. "It's Sir Hinkle Funnyduster."

"Git out of here," Bill scowled at me. "An' stay out."

"I came to tell you about Poppy," says I innocently.

"Well?"

"He's gone up the creek."

"What fur?"

"To catch Davey Jones, I suppose, and doll him up for the intended picture."

"Folderol!" growled Bill, turning his back on me.

Bobs, I think, was glad when the rough-acting marshal left the house and drove away in his car.

"Your mother told me this afternoon, Jerry," I was called aside by the young housekeeper, "that she would fix up a dress for me if I wanted to go to the party to-morrow night. And I was told, too, of your kindly invitation. Nor must either of you feel that I am ungrateful when I tell you that I prefer to stay at home."

I didn't urge her to change her mind. For I don't believe in being deceitful. And, if you must

know the truth, her refusal was a big relief to me. For I had been dreading the thought of what the fellows would say if I took her. Still, don't misunderstand me. I would have done my duty, regardless, if she had accepted my invitation. Not that I would have made a very hot sweetie. For that was new stuff to me. But I sure would have done my best.

"You're a good boy, Jerry," she laughed, reading my thoughts. "And I value your friendship. But don't ever feel that you're duty bound to take me places just because the other boys neglect me. Even poor girls like me, with little or nothing, don't care for that kind of an invitation."

And I thoroughly understood what she meant by that, too.

"You aren't always going to be poor," I spoke encouragingly.

"I'm hoping for the best," says she, with a wistful look in her eyes. "But I won't be disappointed if that option deal falls flat. For the whole thing sounds so—so wonderful to me that I can't make myself believe it's anything but a dream."

"Dream nothing," I told her. "I was there when Mr. Potts signed the paper."

"Do you trust him, Jerry?" she inquired earnestly, searching my face.

"Sure thing," I nodded vigorously. "Poppy does, too."

Peg and Rory were searching the mill for possible secret doors. Nor did I see anything of Scoop when I came out of the cottage. Then, as I caught the plaintive notes of an owl, I pricked up my ears. "Whoo-o-o! Whoo-o-o! Whoo-o-o!" Excited, I gave an answering "Whoo-o-o!" For what I had mistaken for an owl wasn't such at all, but the leader. This "Whoo-o-o!" business was an old signal of ours.

"Have you got the camera?" says he eagerly, when I joined him near the spot where the two of us, the preceding Saturday, had disembarked from the old pancake geezer's raft.

"Sure thing," says I. "And all the other truck, too."

"Fine!" he expressed his satisfaction.

"I rode part of the way with Bill Hadley. And you should have heard him razz me for holding back stuff on him."

Poppy understood.

"Poor Bill!" he laughed. "Always afraid that we're going to get the best of him and thus interfere with the glory of his office. . . . Did you tell him that I was going to take a picture of the turtle?"

"Sure thing."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, he quizzed me. But I couldn't tell him much. Honest, Poppy," I added earnestly, "what *is* your main object in taking the picture, anyway?"

"I don't want to be ridiculed, Jerry," he evaded, acting peculiarly uneasy. "So, for the present, I'm going to keep my theory to myself. . . . Is the camera loaded?"

"Sure thing."

"How about the flash?"

"Everything's ready except inserting the cartridge."

"And what does that do?"

"Ignites the flash powder. It's an idea of my own."

I showed him how it worked.

"Now, come this way," he instructed, when everything was ready. "But step lightly."

Boy, I don't mind telling you that I had goose pimples on me as big as some of those Prancing Pancakes that we had dished out earlier in the day. For here we were sort of creeping along in weeds up to our necks. A lovely place, all right, I thought, for water moccasins and similar slimy creatures. And how lovelier still if old Davey took a sudden notion to block our progress! Br-r-r-r! No wonder I had chills in my backbone. For on top of everything else I had the uneasy feeling, too, that someone was secretly

watching us. Sort of creeping in on us, as it were.

"I found the raft," says Poppy. "Just as I told you, it was hidden in the reeds. And that's where I now expect to find the turtle."

"Let's hope," I shivered, "that the turtle doesn't find us first."

But the leader wasn't a bit scared like me.

"I'm glad you got away from the other fellows, Jerry. For you and I can have more fun working alone."

Fun!

"Sufferin' cats!" I squeaked. "Do you call this fun?"

"Sh-h-h-h!" he hissed. "Not so loud."

"I'm beginning to think you're goofy," I further shivered.

"Maybe I am," says he cheerfully. "But I'm not going to admit it till we have the proof."

He meant the picture, I guess.

"And now what?" says I, as he paused.

"Wait here, Jerry."

"All alone?" I squealed.

"Shucks! You're in no danger."

"Tell me first where Davey Jones is," says I, "and maybe I'll agree with you."

"According to my theory he's over there on the raft."

I tried to pierce the darkness.

"I can't see a thing," I told him uncomfortably.

"Well, the raft's there, all right. For I saw it before I signaled to you."

"Did you see Davey Jones, too?" I inquired eagerly.

"No. But I have a hunch he's there now."

"Doing what?"

"Sleeping, of course."

"Well, for Pete's sake," says I hastily, "don't wake him up."

"He'll probably wake up, all right," was the comforting prediction, "when the flash goes off."

"And then what?" says I anxiously.

The leader gave a queer laugh.

"If you're wise," says he, "you'll beat it out of here as fast as you can go."

Gosh! He sure knew how to cheer a guy up.

A dead silence then followed (except for the pounding of my own heart) as the leader went on alone. Nor could I see him now, for he was working in the dark.

"All right," he whispered, upon his return. "Give me the camera and come this way. But go easy, old kid."

My heart took a complete flop as a twig cracked near by.

"Poppy!" I gasped. "There's someone creeping up on us."

"Probably Scoop or Peg."

I hadn't thought of that!

"Scoop!" I called, in a sort of tremulous voice. "Is it you, Scoop?"

But the only answer was Poppy's angry cry.

"Now you've done it! Davey's awake. I can hear him. He's listening. And in another minute he'll tumble into the pond. Quick, Jerry! Work the flash."

Completely scared out of my wits, the wonder to me is that I had sense enough to obey. But I did. I gave the cartridge cord a quick yank. *Bang!* went the flash powder, lighting up the pond and surrounding jungle as bright as day. Blinded, I turned and ran. And it's a matter of luck that I didn't run into the pond itself. For I had no sense of directions. My only thought was to get away from there as quickly as I could.

Poppy overtook me.

"Hurry, Jerry," he panted. "Get over that stone fence as fast as you can."

And, bu-lieve me, I hurried!

"Are you safe, Poppy?" I gasped, as the two of us tumbled in a heap in the miller's inclosed garden.

"Sure thing," the leader laughed happily. "And the camera, too."

Nor would he let me go to sleep that night until the film had been developed. Closeted in my dark room in the attic, we watched the details show up. Then, taken from its hypo bath, the

negative, after a thorough washing, was held up to a bright light for examination.

"What do you see?" says I breathlessly, as a peculiar quietness settled over the leader.

"You're right, Jerry," says he. "There *was* someone watching us."

He pointed to a man's face in the weeds. A strange face. One I never had seen before. And one, I might add, that gave me the creeps as I looked at it.

I was completely bewildered.

"And is this what you expected to find in the picture?" I inquired helplessly of the leader.

"No," he spoke shortly.

As soon as breakfast was over the following morning I made a print of the picture, the negative having dried overnight. And did I ever stare when I removed the picture from the printing frame.

Old Sir Hinkle had worn a pancake on his head. So had Cap'n Tinkertop and Red's aunt. And here was a turtle who, even more strangely, had a huge pancake tied on its back.

Completely at sea I ran over to Poppy's house to tell him of my amazing discovery. But he had disappeared. Nor did I see him until that night at the party.

CHAPTER XXI

RED'S CAPTIVATING COUSIN

AND this was the day of the big party! I was reminded of it, and the neglected R.S.V.P. stuff (I should have acknowledged the invitation, you know) when Marjorie Van Ness, kind of peeved over my thoughtlessness, called me up on the telephone.

"Aren't you coming, Jerry?" she inquired.

"I haven't a partner," I told her.

"Why don't you bring Barbara Gimp?"

"Don't make fun of her, Marjorie," I spoke earnestly.

"I'm not making fun of her. I feel sorry for her, Jerry. The poor kid! She never gets to go any place. She's a nice girl, too."

"And so are you," I put in warmly.

"If you're too bashful to call her up," the offer was then made to me, "I'll do it for you."

"No chance," I laughed. "For she's already turned me down."

"But you *must* ask somebody," Marjorie insisted, with a touch of impatience.

Boy, here was my chance. But did my face ever burn as I got ready to dish out the big speech.

"I'd like to ask you," I stammered.

"How nice of you!" says she sweetly. "But you should have spoken sooner, Jerry."

"Would you have said yes?" I inquired eagerly.

"Very likely."

"I thought you had a case on Silly Gimp?" I blurted out.

"How ridiculous!" she sought to make light of the affair. "I like him, of course. For that matter, though, I like all the boys, yourself included. . . . But come anyway, Jerry, whether you bring a partner or not. For I'll see that you aren't neglected."

Crickets! I kind of liked to have her talk that way to me. And more than ever I found myself looking forward to the coming party. Still, I knew it wouldn't be right to go alone. And I realized, too, after Marjorie's reminder, that I should have shown more attention to the R.S.V.P. stuff. Little social obligations like that, or whatever you call it, are a part of a boy's bringing up.

There's a girl on Market Street that I like. Her father runs a sauerkraut shop. So I called her up, asking her to go to the party with me.

But I was sixteen hours and forty-eight minutes too late, she told me. Nor could I find a girl in our block who hadn't been invited.

Hopeful that Bobs would change her mind when told that she really was wanted at the party I tried to get her on the telephone, learning, to my amazement, that she and her grandfather had gone to Chicago, a neighbor woman having obligingly offered to take care of the patient.

So that's where Poppy Ott was!

I didn't feel so happy when I left the telephone. For it hurt me to think that my chum would skin out that way on the early morning train without first telling me something about it. Certainly, I told myself, I wouldn't have done that with him. And I began to wonder now, as I roamed about unhappily, if I didn't think a great deal more of him than he did of me.

Still, I told myself sensibly, I'd be dumb to doubt his friendship. He *did* like me. He thought a heap of me, in fact. I knew it. And the mere fact that I had the same warm feeling for him didn't entitle me to share every minute of his time. He had a right to go to Chicago if he wanted to, and felt that such a trip was necessary.

But what had happened, my curiosity asserted itself, to take him out of town, and the others with him, on such short notice? I thought of

that weird face in the weeds. I thought, too, of the sick man at the hotel (I had been told that he was much improved) and the option. Truly, I concluded, familiar with the leader's ways, big things pertaining to the mystery's solution and the miller's welfare were in the wind.

And then did I ever yip with joy when I found a note in the mail box, put there by my bully good chum (loyal, steadfast old Poppy!) on his way to the depot at five-thirty. Everything was clear to me now. But I was told in the note to burn it. So you, too, will have to wait to find out what it contained. And will you ever be surprised! Oh, baby!

Upon our return from Pirate's Bend the preceding night Scoop had dumped a bunch of milling truck into Doc Leland's deserted office. And eager now to get the physician's report on the probable gummed-up pancake flour I put in a call for him, learning that he and his stomach pump were doing emergency work somewhere in the country. There had been many calls, Mrs. Leland told me wearily. She was tired herself from answering the telephone. Which, I took it, was a gentle hint for me to hang up. Which I did.

So there had been many calls! That didn't sound very promising. I was kind of worried, in fact. And I began to wonder where we would wind up. Still, we were guiltless in a way. For

we never knew that there was anything "hairy" about the old miller's pancake flour. It would be tough though, I went around with a long face, if somebody actually died.

And there was Red! I hurried over to his house to make sure that the front door wasn't decorated with the customary funeral bouquet, finding instead a porchful of trunks, just delivered by old Charley Hess, the village drayman.

"Gee whiz! Thar'll be plenty of young sheiks hangin' 'round here now," cackled old Charley, as he climbed stiffly into his seat behind the steering wheel.

"Meaning which?" says I.

"Wait till you see 'er," the drayman further cackled, driving away. "She's a movie queen, too," he called back.

A movie queen! What did he mean, I wondered, staring at the trunks. Certainly, I told myself, they couldn't belong to Aunt Pansy. For she wasn't a movie queen.

Getting his eyes on me Red signaled for me to climb onto the porch roof. Which I did, later joining him in the sick room where he sat propped up in bed just as peppy as ever.

"They tell me," says he, "that Doc Leland pumped a cat's tail out of me. But I don't believe it. For I certainly never ate a cat. And if I had my way I'd get up, too. But Ma says I've

got to stay in bed. It's Doc's orders, she says."

I sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Good old Red!" says I warmly, which was my way of letting his know how glad I was that he wasn't reposing in state in the parlor.

"I'm afraid I'll have to miss the party, Jerry. And I hear, too, that they're going to have pink ice cream. But my loss," he heaved a healthy sigh, "will be your gain."

"I'm sorry, Red, that you won't be able to eat the ice cream yourself," says I feelingly.

"Ice cream, your granny!" he let out a snort. "I didn't mean that. I'm talking about Tessie."

"Tessie?" says I, searching his face. "Tessie who?"

Certainly, I made a quick canvass of my memory, that was a new name to me.

"Why, my cousin, of course," says he. "Tessie Morn. Haven't you heard about her being in town?"

Tessie Morn! That sounded like a movie queen's name, all right. And I further connected the name with the pile of trunks on the front porch.

"I never knew," says I curiously, "that you had a movie queen in the family."

"Nor me, either," says he, "till Ma got a letter the other day from Hollywood, telling us that we were going to have company. That's why I

told you to go easy on the partner business. For there's nothing stingy about me."

"Probably not," I agreed, kind of dizzy-like. "But tell me what you mean."

"I'm going to let you take her to the party."

I stared at him.

"Me?" I cried.

"Sure thing."

"But how old is she?" I inquired hastily.

"Sweet sixteen. And *beautiful?* Oh, baby!" the speaker rolled his eyes. "She'll knock 'em dead."

I began to sweat.

"No, thanks," says I, backing away. "That kind of a girl wouldn't care to fool around with me."

"Don't be a goof," he scowled. "I've told her all kinds of nice things about you. She thinks you're the hit of the village—tall and handsome and everything else. When you were a baby, I said, the girls used to line up for blocks to kiss you. She even knows you have a dimple."

Good grief!

"Did you tell her all that junk?" I gasped.

"Sure thing. So get busy and do your stuff, Lochinvar."

"But what am I supposed to do?" says I helplessly.

He fished around among his pillows.

"Here it is," says he, producing a tattered booklet.

I let out my neck.

"What is it?" I inquired.

" 'McCracken's Condensed Book of Parlor Etiquette,' " he recited. "I've been studying it myself. Tells how to eat soup without striking any bass notes. But here's the dope for you on page eighteen. 'How to Court a Widow.' "

"Red!" I gasped.

"My mistake," says he quickly. "I should have turned to page twenty. See, here it is. 'How to Make Love to an Actress.' Sit down and I'll read it to you."

So I sat down—or, rather, I sort of wilted down. And this is what he read:

How to Make Love to an Actress

To successfully make love to the heart of an actress, you must have the cash. There is no use making war without the sinews. If you can get in with some theatrical reporter and pay him to write up some very flattering articles for you and put them in the paper, signing them "Her Admirer," and then manage to let her know that you wrote them, it will have a great effect. Actresses are usually more vain than mercenary, and by thus flattering her vanity you will prepare her for a favorable introduction. You can easily accomplish this through some friend of

hers on the stage. If she is not displeased with you, she will gracefully receive your flowers and other presents, and will, on almost any evening after the play is over, eat a game dinner at your expense. As a whole actresses are terribly expensive sweethearts and equally expensive wives.

Finishing, Red told me to ring the bell on his dresser.

"What for?" says I dizzily.

"I want Tessie to come up so that I can introduce you to her, like the book says."

"Nothin' doin'!" I cried. And then, as I heard footsteps on the stairs, I escaped through the window, taking the booklet with me.

Locking myself in my room, I paced the floor. For I was deeply agitated, or whatever you call it. Should I do it, I asked myself? Or shouldn't I? I kept on pacing. And why not? A chance like that would be pie and ice cream to Silly. And certainly I was as smart as he was. I had nice clothes, too. And they looked just as good on me as his clothes did on him.

Besides, Dad had told me that I could use the car.

My mind made up now, I slipped into the bathroom and locked the door. Then whistling sort of unconcerned-like, to disarm Mother, I got out Dad's safety razor. But was I ever careful as I started the fuzz-sleuthing process! For I'd look

hot accompanying a movie queen to the party with the end of my nose cut off.

"Tra-la-la-la-la!" I sang merrily. Boy, I told myself, as I massacred the fuzz on my upper lip, this was going to be fun. A movie queen! Or, to be more exact, a *beautiful* movie queen who was sweet sixteen. Rather young, I thought critically, to be a queen. But that was all right. Probably she got an early start. Anyway, thanks to Red—good, generous old Red!—I was the picked one. Taking her in my arms (in imagination, of course), I sort of waltzed around the bathroom, but stopped, and kind of jerked myself back to earth, as it were, when I skidded into the empty tub.

Then, as I rubbed my shins, I sort of pictured myself sweeping into the ballroom with the illustrious visitor on my arm. How Silly would envy me! "Tra-la-la-la-la!" I raised my voice. This sure was a beautiful world, all right. And to think that I had called Red a pig and other mean names! Boy, I'd eat out of his hand after this. Good old Red! A friend worth having, I told myself, as the last suffering gob of fuzz succumbed, or whatever you call it, before the onslaught of the safety-razor blade.

An hour later I presented myself, in all the grandeur of my Sunday suit, at the Meyers' front door. And if I had been the dressy local under-

taker himself Mrs. Meyers couldn't have showed greater surprise. I think she was kind of upset, too. For this thing of entertaining a movie queen with six trunks was new stuff to her.

"Goodness gracious!" she stared at me. "Is it really you, Jerry Todd?"

"Yes, ma'am," says I politely.

"But what in the world are you doing all dressed up at this time of day?"

I couldn't very well tell her (that is I hated to tell her) that I had come over purposely to meet the famous movie queen, who, favoring that old composition, "The Maiden's Prayer," was now chasing her lily-white fingers up and down the keyboard of the Meyers' piano. Then, as I stood there sort of blushing and stammering, wondering, too, if I had put furniture polish on my face instead of bayrum, what do you know if that little imp of an Eva Ringer didn't stick her impudent mug around a corner of the door and start making fun of me.

"Jerry's got a girl!" she danced, poking her finger at me. "Jerry's got a girl."

Mrs. Meyers turned aside to clear her throat. I think I heard her snicker, too. Gosh! I felt like a fool. And did I ever long to put that Ringer kid in her place. The gabby little brat!

"The Maiden's Prayer" having come to a sudden booming end, I caught the flash of a pink

dress in the parlor door. Then there danced into sight the prettiest and snappiest girl I ever had seen. Boy, she was a la-la. Hair like gold. All crinkly, too, and snarly-like. And such wonderful eyes! Just one look into them and I felt mesmerized, like the old black-toe geezer in one of my books. Was this love at first sight? It must be, I concluded, heaving a sigh.

"Oh-h-h-h!" squealed Tessie, her blue eyes dancing in time to her voice when she found out who I was. "So *you* are Jerry Todd. I've heard such *won-nderful* things about you. I've read your books, too. And I think they're *won-nderful.* Simply *mar-rvelous.*"

Well, there was no need of arguing with her about that. So, as politely as I could, I told her that I was as pleased to meet her as she was to meet me, after which I asked her to go to the party with me. I'd call for her with the big car, I said, at eight-thirty.

"Oh-h-h-h!" she further squealed, clapping her hands. "How *won-nderful!* After living in Hollywood, which, you know, is very much of a city—and such a *won-nderful* place—I was afraid that I might not like Tutter. But I simply adore it. And I can see now that I'm going to have a most *won-nderful* time."

Disobeying orders, Red then got out of bed and appeared at the head of the stairs.

"Kiss her if you want to, Jerry," he hissed down the steps. "I did."

Kiss her! Sufferin' cats! What I did instead was to beat it for home as fast as I could, where I quickly changed to my everyday clothes.

CHAPTER XXII

BOBS' TRIUMPH

NEWS travels fast in small towns like ours. So by noon the majority of the Tutterites had heard that the Meyers family on Main Street was entertaining a movie queen from Hollywood. Nor did Tessie need any of my assistance to get her name in the paper, having freely told the local reporter who called on her what she thought of the town in general, its new library and everything else including the chances of the Republican party at the coming election. It was all simply *won-nderful.* Positively *mar-rvelous.* Later I cut her picture out of the evening newspaper and put it in my watchcase. I had a hard time getting it all in. But I succeeded. Nor must I forget to mention the basket of flowers that I sent up to her that afternoon, bought with money that I shook out of my bank. But however much I wanted to impress her favorably I decided to pass up that "game" supper business, as specified in the etiquette book, realizing that if I pulled a stunt like that in one of the downtown restau-

rants I'd stop the traffic. Anyway, she'd get plenty to eat at the party. I'd see to that, even slipping my own sandwiches to her if necessary.

Somehow I *wanted* to share my things with her. Which either was love, I told myself, wondering when I ought to shave again, or some new kind of a disease that I never had heard about.

Red called me up that afternoon to tell me to be sure and wash my ears. That wasn't in the book, he said, but it was highly important. For once he read about a Knight who was proposing. And the Lady Fair turned him down flat because his ears were dirty.

"So don't take any chances," my adviser wound up. "Use soap on 'em and everything, including a mop if necessary. . . . Do you like her, Jerry?"

"She's *won-nderful,*" I breathed. "Simply *mar-rvelous.*"

"Haw! haw! haw!" boomed the listener.

"What are you laughing at?" I inquired stiffly.

"Oh, I just swallowed a feather and it tickles. . . . Better clean your teeth, too," he further advised.

I began to wonder if he thought I was perfectly helpless.

"Your mother will clean you with a stick," I told him, "if you don't go back to bed and shut up."

"I saw the flowers you sent her," he then told me.

"Well," I grunted uneasily, "what of it?"

"They're *won-nderful,*" he cooed. "Simply *mar-rvelous.*"

Peg came over at five-thirty to borrow a pair of my party socks, telling me that his own fancy socks were all in the wash. So I fixed him up. And then, having some time to spare, we sat down and studied the turtle picture that had been such a shock to me earlier in the day.

"That geezer in the weeds," says I, "was a big surprise to Poppy. He admitted it. But he never said a word about the pancake on the turtle's back. So I have a hunch he kind of expected that. Though how he found out about it, and what it all means, is a senseless riddle to me."

Peg further studied the pictured face.

"Boy, he's a hard looker. You sure startled him with that flash. Do you suppose those are real whiskers?"

"And why not?"

"They look kind of phony to me. Still, it isn't old Gimlet. I'm dead sure of that."

"How would you like to meet him in a dark alley?" I laughed, when it had been agreed between us that the weird face, even if it was disguised, was a strange one to us.

"Br-r-r-r!" Peg shivered. "Queer, though," he added, kind of reflective-like, "that we hadn't picked up some clew of this geezer before if he's actually mixed up in the mystery, as we think."

"I heard him following us in the dark," says I. "And was I ever scared!"

"Have you showed this picture to Bill Hadley?" Peg asked.

"No."

"Don't you think you should? For he may know who the old geezer is. Certainly, if he's a bad egg the sooner he's flopped into jail the better."

"I want Poppy to see the picture first," says I.

"But I thought he had seen it."

"Not the picture itself," I explained. "All he saw was the wet negative."

Peg then shoved one of his chummy grins at me.

"What's this I hear about you and the movie actress?" says he curiously.

"Look me over," I kind of strutted around.

"Then it's true," says he, "that you've got her dated up for the party?"

"Nothing else but," says I proudly.

"Lucky dog!"

"Wait till you see her," I enthused. "She's *won-nderful.* Simply *mar-rvelous.*"

"How'll you trade?" says he quickly, naming his partner.

"Nothin' doin'," I motioned him away.

Following supper I put on the recommended ear-digging act. Then, having used up a whole bar of soap (for I even washed my feet!) I again got into my good clothes. Usually I can dress in a hurry. But I took all kinds of time to-night, realizing that my partner, with six trunkfuls of dresses to pick from, would probably look like a million dollars. Nor was I satisfied with my necktie until I had knotted it eleven times. Which shows you what love at first sight will do for a fellow. I spent a lot of time on my hair, too, first plastering it with grease for that purpose and then parting it painstakingly. Some gloss, let me tell you, when I finished. I hated to cover it up with my cap. Satisfied with my appearance I stopped for final inspection in the parlor, both Mother and Dad showing by their faces how proud they were of me, after which I got into the car and drove over to Red's house.

"Hi," the invalid waved to me from his bedroom window.

"Hi," I waved back.

"Gee, you look hot. . . . Shave?"

The big sap! And people listening, too!

"Shut up!" I glared.

"I asked you if you shaved?" he boomed.

Everybody in the house heard him. For his gab carries a mile. Nor did Mr. Meyers, who was reading on the porch, where earlier the visitor's numerous trunks had obstructed the front door, try to conceal the fact that he was snickering at me behind his newspaper. Gosh! Deliver me from ever going through another experience like that.

"It's so nice of you to come and get me," cooed Tessie, as I gallantly helped her into the car, Red the while telling me to go easy on my Pa's shoes and not get them scratched up. "And those flowers you sent me," she looked up at me with those big eyes of hers, "were *won-nderful.* Simply *mar-rvelous.*"

I wanted to tell her, with fast thumping heart, that *she,* too, looked marvelous. For was she ever lit up! Oh, baby! Clothes like that, with wraps and everything to match, jewelry included, seldom is seen in our small town.

Afraid that I might run out of stuff to talk about I had made a sort of mental list of suitable subjects, including croquet, canaries and valentines. But this was needless preparation. For she did all the talking. And I felt kind of little and insignificant, small-town bog-jumper that I was, as she told me all about the famous people that she hobnobbed with in Hollywood, chief among them Douglas Fairbanks himself, whom,

it seems, she had met in a tea garden. Nor was it entertaining to me to have her sit there and tell me how Doug draped his manly arm around her when they danced together. That arm of his seemed to mean a whole lot to her, I told myself jealously. She was still talking about it when we drove up in front of Marjorie's home, every room of which, like the illuminated lawn, blazed with light. I could hear music, too, and laughing voices. A swell affair, all right, I told myself, very well satisfied with my part in it.

"How *won-nderful,*" cooed Tessie, as I assisted her up the porch steps. "Simply *mar-rvelous.* And I just adore that waltz the orchestra is playing. It reminds me of that enchanting moonlit night in the Canton Tea Garden when I danced with Douglas——"

I couldn't see the need of listening to that story all over again. Anyway, the slim waist that Doug had embraced so memorably was now mine. I'd show her, I told myself grimly, wanting to give her something to remember, that I was just as good a hugger as he was. She didn't know it, but one time I hugged my grandmother so hard, in fun, that I cracked one of her ribs. All I asked for was plenty of room on the dance floor and a nice peppy tune.

In all her talk, though, she didn't say much about her own work. And that kind of puzzled

me. Either she didn't want to tell me this, I sensibly concluded, or she hadn't as much to talk about as she tried to let on.

"Marjorie will want to know what feature pictures you played in," I gave her a strong hint, as we came to the front door.

"Oh, let's not talk shop," says she, putting her hand sort of quavering-like on my arm. "Pretty please."

Which was all Greek to me. But it was easy enough for me to shut up.

And was she ever the hit of the party! Oh, boy! The other girls, at first, acted dazed as they saw her flitting about among the boys like a gorgeous humming bird looking for a place to roost. The boys liked it, too. But the girls didn't. Even Marjorie began to sulk when Silly attached himself to the tail of the new comet. As for me, having once taken her there she seemed to forget that I was on earth. It was an awful shock to me. And I found that my sudden and burning love for her was rapidly cooling off.

"If they act like that in Hollywood," Marjorie told me, as the belle of the ball tripped by in Silly's masterful embrace, "I'm glad I live on this side of the Rockies."

"You and me both," says I.

"And I heard," Marjorie kind of rubbed it in, "that you actually sent her a basket of flowers."

"Three dollars and forty-five cents' worth," I itemized regretfully.

"Imagine! Were you mesmerized?"

"I thought it was love at first sight," I admitted.

"How silly! Let's dance this ourselves, Jerry."

Which we did. And then, as the clock struck ten, I began to watch the door, Poppy having told me in his note that he and his traveling companion would be home on the ten o'clock train.

Nor was I disappointed. Following a stir at the door my chum appeared there, all lit up in a new black suit with satin lapels. Regular party stuff. And there hanging on his arm was Bobs. But not the Bobs I had known. It was a new Bobs, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes. A regular queen. Her hair was done in the latest style. Boy, in that fluffy green party dress, with a green necklace to match, and those high-heeled silver slippers, she sure was hot. No wonder everybody stopped dancing and stared.

"Why . . . it's *Bobs!*" cried Marjorie, running across the room. "Bobs, dear, I'm so glad you came. But what a surprise! And what a *beautiful* gown."

"Simply *mar-rvelous,*" chimed in Tessie, who had edged herself into the front row. "It makes me think of the green gown—an exclusive French

creation, too—worn by Norma Shearer the night I met Douglas——"

Which reminded *me* that I hadn't cracked her rib yet! But I had loftier ambitions now.

"And what is this?" inquired Marjorie, as she saw a music roll in Poppy's hand.

"My music," says he, with grinning eyes.

"And you're really going to play for us?"

"You asked me to," he reminded.

"Why, of course I did. And Sylvester is going to play, too. Aren't you, Sylvester?"

"Oh-h-h-h! How *won-nderful,*" Tessie clapped her hands. "How *mar-rvelous.*"

"It'll be a pleasure," says Silly gallantly, "to play for you."

"Oh-h-h-h! You adorable boy."

And to think that I had been her slave, I sort of kicked myself in the seat of my Sunday pants. I certainly had made a fool of myself.

Told that they could take a rest the members of the hired orchestra went outside to stretch their legs. And having produced a roll of music of his own, Paderewski, II, strutted over to the piano, where Tessie had already becomingly draped herself.

"I'm going to look into your eyes all the time you are playing," she cooed.

"My inspiration!" breathed Silly.

And did I ever feel like heaving up!

"First," says Tutter's musical prodigy, talking like a radio announcer, "you will hear Mozart's Minuette from the E flat Symphony. There is no name in the whole history of music, I might say, around which time has thrown such a glamour of romance as that of Mozart. In the opening measure of this famous composition you will first detect the festal pomp, so characteristic of Mozart's art. Liveliness and coquettish sweetness ring out in the melodic steps. It is like laughter and chat intermixed."

After listening to which I told myself, dizzily, that Silly sure was getting his money's worth in Chicago. Gosh! But I have a hunch that it was truck that he had memorized for the occasion. For he isn't so wonderful.

After tickling the piano keys he got up and made another announcement.

"In the following trio begins a more flowing melody which is treated in the dialogue manner and forcibly suggests a conversation still in the mood of delicate raillery and exhaustless good humor."

Yet nobody fainted! Which shows you what rugged constitutions the Tutter people have, even the kids.

"And now," the presiding genius made his final memorized announcement, "a slight tinge of distress and insistence falls upon the mood of the

composer. The gayety, however, is quickly resumed and the badinage which, true to the nature of the composer, never degenerates below a level of intellectual refinement and charming courtesy, brings us to a close."

Which, I'll have to admit, came so nearly to knocking us out that the most of us forgot to applaud.

"And now," says Marjorie, turning to Poppy, "let us hear from you."

"Haw! haw! haw!" jeered Silly, satisfied with the show that he had made of himself. "This is going to be funny."

What *would* Poppy do, I wondered, kind of anxious-like, hating to think that he would have to take a back seat. For I happened to know that his musical education had started and stopped with that two-fingered tune called "Peter, Peter, Pumpkin-Eater." I guess you know that one. Practically every kid does.

There was a ripple of laughter as Poppy gravely positioned his music on the piano rack. For it wasn't music at all, but the cover of a mail-order catalog.

"First," he says, in imitation of his musical rival, now smugly taking in the performance, confident, of course, that no one could beat *him,* "you'll hear the melodic strains of the Kitchenette, in three movements, that immortal compo-

sition of the famous Russian composer, Ivan Awful Itch. As I play the first movement, imagine yourselves in a deep forest. There, beside a purling brook, sit two lovers. They represent youth, fire, gayety and promise. They are tenderly soaking their feet in the water. And the little fish, as they swim around and around the two pairs of bare feet, his pair and her pair, hold their little noses. Why, you ask sensibly, do not the little fish, as they gasp for air, swim away? Ah, ha! Therein lies the secret of Ivan Awful Itch's immortal art. The poor little fish never had been taught to swim in a straight line. They are doomed unless the lovers soon remove their feet from the purling brook."

Well, say, you should have heard those kids yell! It was a regular riot.

Then, having gravely played his one and only tune, Poppy further announced:

"In the second movement we see the same forest. But here is depicted, in somber tones, the serious side of life. There is less gayety and more responsibility. The lovers are now husband and wife. The purling brook is frozen. The trees are bare. They are, in fact, entirely too bare. And having gravely considered the situation the local committee on civic reform has decreed that each and every bare limb must have a stocking of its own. Now as I unfold the story

to you in harmony you will hear the bare limbs twittering to one another. Great is their indignation. They asked for pink stockings. They ordered pink stockings. They expected pink stockings. But, alas, they got green stockings instead."

Following which the musician played the second verse of his abbreviated repertoire, or whatever you call it.

"And now," he arose the third time, "we have the concluding movement of this famous suite. Old age and a well-spent life is our musical theme. We see the aged husband and wife in their humble abode. The good wife is busy in the kitchen, from which this immortal composition gets its title. She is cooking. What is she cooking? Can't you smell it? No? Well, then, before I tell you in terms of exquisite harmony—harmony that stands as an enduring monument to the memory of that grand artist, Ivan Awful Itch—I'll tell you in words. She is frying liver and onions."

"You aren't funny," glared Silly, when the thundering applause died out.

And you should have seen his face! Boy, was it ever red!

"No?" Poppy grinned pleasantly.

"It was absurd," Tessie loyally tilted her Hollywood nose. "Positively *absurd.*"

"I thought it was *won-nderful,*" Marjorie chimed in spitefully. "Simply *mar-rvelous.*"

Then we all turned as Lawyer Van Ness came hurriedly into the room.

"Your grandfather wants to speak with you on the telephone," he told Bobs.

She wasn't out of our sight more than two minutes. And when she returned she had her wraps on.

"Bobs!" I cried, startled by the look on her face.

"Quick!" she told me. "Get Poppy and take me home."

First, though, I had to make polite excuses to Tessie.

"Don't excite yourself about *me,*" she kind of turned up her nose at me. "I already had decided to go home with Sylvester Gimp. For I've lost my interest in small boys, even story writers."

Yes, I felt like telling her, and I have lost my interest in actresses, too.

CHAPTER XXIII

SIR HINKLE'S STORY

Bobs told us excitedly, as we got under way, that Sir Hinkle had recovered his senses. He had started talking early in the evening. Startled by what she heard, the woman in charge of the patient had summoned her husband, who, in turn, hearing the story, quickly called on his neighbors for assistance.

Then, as we rounded a bend in the Happy Hollow road, we met the Tutter ambulance.

"It's Uncle Sylvester," Bobs spoke in a peculiarly hushed voice. "They've found him at last."

"Not dead!" I cried, sort of horror-stricken.

And, to that point, an ambulance does look a lot like a hearse, especially in the dark.

"I hope not," Bobs spoke emotionally. "For though he has been unfair with us, and probably would have cheated us out of everything we have if you boys hadn't stepped in, I wouldn't want him to die a death like that."

Later that night, though, we learned that old

Gimlet was not far from death's door. Imprisoned in the mill's secret room by one he thought dead, bound hand and foot, with a gag in his mouth, he had been without food or attention for almost a week. Had he been without water, too, he surely would have died. But his prison was a sort of natural cave, as I'll mention later, from the stone ceiling of which water constantly dribbled. He got some of this in his mouth, through the soaked gag. Not much—but enough to keep him alive. Such was his condition when the directed neighbors found him. And I'm glad to report that he's alive to-day, and, so far as I know to the contrary, none the worse for his experience. But he no longer lives in Tutter. Selling out to the National Hardware and Hinge Syndicate, he and his smart grandson moved to California, where Silly, I dare say, is flitting around with other "movie queens."

For the joke is that Tessie wasn't a movie queen at all. She wanted to be. And had, in fact, taken a small part in one or two pictures. But nothing worthy of mention, which explains why she was so unwilling, that night of the party, to "talk shop." As for hobnobbing with Douglas Fairbanks, and others in the business, that was all a beautiful brain storm of hers. An orphan, with lots of money, it was easy for her to pretend to be what she wasn't, a matter of

much embarrassment to her Tutter relatives when the truth came out. And I should worry whether Doug actually hugged her or not. For I have no interest in her now. And how I ever fell for that silly gab of hers is beyond me. I did, though. Which shows you how a designing woman can twist a worthy man around her finger. As I told Poppy the day the miller got his holdings in the new company—an even hundred thousand dollars' worth of stock—I was through with women for life. Absolutely and nothing else but. Silly and his kind could have them all.

Still, that little sauerkraut girl on Market Street is hot. I sometimes wish she'd look at me when I walk past her desk to the pencil sharpener. One day I sharpened every pencil on our side of the room. But she was too interested in the pictured skeleton in her physiology book to notice me.

The Tutter people felt no regret when old Gimlet finally left town, bag and baggage. And those who were gladdest to see him go were his own workmen, all of whom got a raise in pay when the new management took charge. For Mr. Potts is fair. A money maker, he also makes money for those associated with him. So it isn't improbable that Bobs some day will inherit a fortune. That big dream of hers of going away to school can easily be realized. In fact, she'll

soon be leaving us. And how I'll miss her! But I'm glad she's going. For, like Poppy, I, too, enjoy seeing people happy. And I'm going to keep on in life doing all I can to spread happiness.

As I write this, a month after the wind-up of our adventure, a gang of men are at work in the old mill, remodeling it and otherwise fitting it for its new machinery, which, as you can imagine, is of great interest to old Peter. Yet he hasn't lost interest in his own inventions. Far from it. Having built himself a new workshop he putters there by the hour. He failed, though, to get a patent on his new hinge. His design, the patent office reported through Lawyer Van Ness, was an infringement of something already on the market. So very probably he will drop hinges. It's wonderful, I think, that an old man of his advanced age, after so many years of poverty, can employ his time as he pleases. His secret formula, so Mr. Potts tells me, is one of the new concern's greatest assets. It is kept in a big vault. As for growing hair on bald heads—ha-ha! Boy, that sure was funny. And we actually believed it, too.

Gimp's Prancing Pancake Flour will soon be known the world over. But not as a cure for bald heads! Poppy says it'll be a million-dollar business inside of ten years. I suppose it pleases

him to think that he thought up that striking name. But he never says anything about it. The local newspaper, though, heaped praise on him.

Sir Hinkle was indeed the man we suspected. And now, to wind up my book, I'll let him tell his own story just as he told it to us that night of the interrupted party, to appear at which, in style, Bobs and Poppy had made a special trip to Chicago, taking old Mr. Gimp along to pay the bills. For new dresses and hair-frizzing costs money. Nor was I a bit jealous that Bobs had consented to go to the party with Poppy (as he explained to me in his note) after turning me down. She mentioned it afterwards. But that was perfectly all right with me, I declared. Smart kid that she is, she knew how to wear those new clothes of hers. She knew how to put grace into her movements, too, and everything else. All she needed was a chance. And what a joke it would be if that smart Minnie Bracket tried to make fun of her to-day. Why, she has Minnie and her kind outclassed a million miles.

We were gathered around the bed that night—Bobs on one side and my chum and I on the other. The miller was there, too, all excited over the now known identity of the sick man. And later, toward the close of the story, Bill Hadley came in, the two men greeting each other like old pals. So I saw right off, contrary to our suspicions,

that Bill never had intended to turn the supposed pirate over to the English prison authorities. In fact it was Bill's kindly scheme, as I learned later, to help his old friend in every way he could. We got tangled up on that point. We got tangled up on a dozen other points, too. But all detectives, I suppose, get bum leads.

"Yep," the sick man told us, looking at us sort of wan-like with his faded blue eyes, "I'm Rufus Gimp. It warn't me that was hung in England. No. It was a young feller named Hi Morton that I got chummy with after I run away from home. It was Hi who wanted me to go buccaneerin'. An', if I must tell you the truth, I did take a crack at it. But it warn't nothin', I saw, to keep up. So I dropped it. Hi, though, a reckless feller, kep' on. Gittin' mixed up with a New Orleans woman in a way that was no credit to him—he already had a wife, mind you—he married this second woman under my name. They got to fightin'. So he skinned out, fallin' into added evil ways. It was this second wife of his'n who told about him havin' my name when he was hanged, only, of course, she thought the name was his'n. Nor did he say nothin' dif-'rent. Fur he had a good family behind him, who, no doubt, wonder to this day what become of him.

"I knocked around a bit. An' on one of my

voyages to the tropics I was shipwrecked on a' island whar I lived fur more'n three years on turtle eggs an' soup. That's whar I met ol' Davey. Me an' him made friends right off. An' later, when I put to sea on a raft, he went along, him doin' the towin' an' me ridin', jest as I told this b'y"—he looked at me—"only that other stuff that I put into my story about the empty shoes was all made up. My idear of a joke. Picked up by a tramp schooner I wouldn't let them make soup of Davey, as they wanted to do. No, sir-ee! An' havin' taught him some tricks I started a show with him when I got back to the States. Purty soon I had a pony in my show, too, an' then a little elephant. It kept on growin' —the show, I mean—an' in time I found myself the owner of a payin' business.

"My father was dead. An' havin' quarreled with one of my older brothers I was kind of soured on the both of them, which explains why I waited so long to come back. It sarved my purpose very nicely to let my relatives around here think that I was dead. Nor would any of my people have recognized me if they had seen me. Fur I had changed with advancin' years. That mole, though," he bared his right elbow, "let the cat out of the bag. So I had the pesky thing fixed up by a purfessional tattooer. Not to much success, however.

"Havin' made my stake in the show business, I began to wonder about things back home. An' comin' here secretly I learned how things was. Sylvester had everything an' Pete nothin'." The two brothers clasped hands. "I was sorry fur you, Pete. I felt harder than ever toward Sylvester. An' it was then that I thought up that crazy pancake scheme. Fur I was kind of itchin' fur revenge."

Crazy pancake scheme! Boy, we were all attention.

"What I wanted to do," the sick man went on, his eyes kind of narrowed now, "was to skin my rich brother out of a lot of money. That would gall him beyond words. So, havin' cooked up my pancake scheme, I wrote my oldest brother a letter, tellin' him that his pancakes, as put on my supposedly bald head, had brought out a new crop of hair. Then, before showin' up here ag'in, I *shaved my head.* So you kin see now what brought my hair out. I never was bald."

No wonder, I thought, that the contrasting mat of black hair on the bared chest had puzzled me.

"Makin' myself known to my ol' friend, Cap'n Tinkertop, I got his help. He, too, shaved his head an' began wearin' pancakes. An' he got a

job at the hinge factory so he could be handy to keep tellin' my miserly brother how the pancakes that he was wearin' was bringin' out a new crop of hair on his head. A cure fur bald heads! Sylvester, I knew, would see millions in it. Then, I was to be introduced—though not under my own name. I, too, had grown hair on my head with Gimp's Fancy Mixture. As further proof of the flour's wonderful hair-growin' powers I brought along Davey Jones, who, strangely, has a little hunk of fuzz on the top of his shell. Not hair, exactly. But somethin' that looks like hair. Surely, was my conclusion, if we could convince Sylvester that the pancakes even grew hair on a turtle's back he'd do everything in his power, miser that he was, to git hold of the marvelous formula, which I intended to steal an' later sell to him fur a big price. Thus I'd git his money. An' my older brother would be nothin' out."

Which cleared up added puzzling points. But what a crazy scheme! And built on lies, too, which was all wrong. Certainly, it was no credit to its originator. Yet, if it had worked, and old Gimlet had dropped a fortune (which Rufus intended turning over to his oldest brother) how furious the hinge manufacturer would have been. And it might have worked, too, if Fate hadn't

upset the trickster's plans. For gold bricks of a sort have been sold to even smarter men than old Gimlet.

"In buildin' the foundation of his mill," the story was resumed, "my father tapped a small cave. An' what his idear was I never learned, but he had a secret door built over the cave's mouth, the door openin' into the mill's lower wall. That is whar I took Sylvester last Saturday night when I hit him on the head. Fixin' him so he couldn't sound an alarm—an' expectin', of course, to git back to him shortly—I then prepared to steal the secret formula. . . . Did you say the men got Sylvester out of the mill, all right?"

"Yes," says Poppy. "He's being taken care of in Tutter."

"An' mebbe I should tell you b'ys," the old man then looked at us with a kind of whimsical smile, "why I adopted the name of Sir Hinkle Funnyduster. You see I was hidin' in the barn that rainy day, havin' left Davey outside of town. It was queer, I thought, that you fellers should be talkin' about a man havin' a pet turtle when *I* had a pet turtle. So, hookin' the card, I decided, as a joke, to use that name myself if I come in contact with you, which I did when I got knocked on the head in the alley."

Rufus Gimp is still in Tutter, though how long he'll stay here I can't say. But I like to have

him around. And now that he and Davey Jones have been reunited I'm almost as good a friend of the odd turtle's as its queer owner. Yes, sir, old Davey is all right. Yet what a scare we gave him that night in the swamp!

When quizzed about his object in taking the flashlight picture, Poppy grinned.

"A chance remark between two old men, one of whom was joking the other about his bald head, put me wise. For something was said about the impossibility of growing hair on a *turtle's back.* Boy, did I ever prick up my ears. So *that* was it! There *was* trickery afoot. For I had found out, too, that Cap'n Tinkertop had shaved his head. Having located the raft I rightly concluded that the lonely turtle, associating the raft with the beloved absent owner, would come back there to sleep. Hence the picture in the dark."

As for the "whiskered face" in the weeds, that was Bill Hadley. He took that way of spying on us, detective-style, to make sure that we weren't putting something over on him. No wonder Peg thought the whiskers were phony. Having seen this disguise of Bill's I should have recognized it. But I didn't.

The peculiar "hair" epidemic quickly passed over, allowing Doc to put his stomach pump away. As for the hunk of hair that came out

of Red, we'll probably never know what the kid ate. Having overheard some of our talk, his Aunt Pansy put that pancake on her head to fool him. Nor did she growl at him over the loss of her switch. Which is a wonder.

Then, when Cap'n Tinkertop was brought home, quite as well as ever, but ashamed of his part in the shabby scheme, we learned that it was his shoes that had been picked up near the spring.

Which brings me to the end of my story. And you may now put this book aside, if you wish. On the other hand if you enjoy the kind of stories *I* write it will pay you, I think, to turn to the following pages and thus get acquainted with Trigger Berg and the kind of stories *he* writes. For his stories (written in diary form) and mine are both put into shape for publication by the same man—Leo Edwards.

I hope you'll like Trigger and his skylarking pals, Friday, Slats and Tail Light. I think they're hot. And look for me soon in the big outdoor story, *Poppy Ott Hits the Trail*

CHAPTER XXIV

BETWEEN US AUTHORS

MR. EDWARDS says I should tell you right off who I am. So here goes. My name is Trigger Berg and I live in Crocketville, Illinois. I'm not as old as Jerry Todd. Nor do I claim to be as good a story-writer as he is. In fact it was a big surprise to me when my Uncle Ben, who is a member of the Grosset & Dunlap Company, took my first diary and, with Mr. Edwards' help, made it into a book, calling it *Trigger Berg and the Treasure Tree.*

It was a big day for me, let me tell you, when I received my first copy of the new book, containing pictures drawn by the same artist (Bert Salg) who illustrates the Jerry Todd books. Then I started my second diary. That has been made into a book, too. *Trigger Berg and his 700 Mouse Traps* is the title. Now I'm writing my third diary, which, if it is any good, Mr. Edwards says, will be made into a book, too, entitled *Trigger Berg and the Sacred Pig.*

But it's my understanding that Mr. Edwards wants me to tell you something about the books

that I already have written. So I guess I'll turn to Chapter VII of the *Mouse Trap* story. Here it is:

August 18. This was Boy Scout day at our Sunday school. The scouts all wore their uniforms and took up the class collections, after which the patrol leader made a short speech. This, however, was all wasted on the girls in the intermediate class, who were so busy planning an afternoon "treasure hunt" that they never heard a word that was said.

I'll be glad when I'm old enough to join the Boy Scouts. For our church has the swellest patrol in Crocketville. I bet it's hot to be a Boy Scout and wear a uniform. Now when I meet Betty Sharpe (a neighbor girl) in the street she makes faces at me. But if I had a uniform I bet you she'd say "Oh-h-h-h!" sort of admiring-like.

It was Slats' suggestion at Sunday school (one of my pals whose real name is John Beale) that we all take a walk down the river, which we did, starting out right after dinner. Pretty soon we came within sight of Boney Island.

"I dare anyone to swim across," says Slats.

"Tell me first," says Pickles (a friend of Slats' from Milwaukee), "how the island got its queer name."

"Years ago," says Slats, "they used to butcher sick cattle there, grinding up the meat for fertilizer, or something. Naturally a lot of bones got scattered around. And so the people began calling it Boney Island."

Friday (another chum of mine named Ronald Fish) gave a yip from the water's edge.

"Look!" says he. "It's all hard bottom. I bet we can wade across."

So we skinned out of our clothes, hiding them in the bushes, and with Tail Light (Slats' kid brother) bringing up the rear, as usual, we started single file through the water. It was fun. But toward the last we kind of had to drag Tail Light by the neck, for the water got pretty deep.

"I bet a cookie," says Slats, when we finally landed safely on the island, "that we struck the old Indian ford. I've heard my grandpa tell about it."

"Let's mark it," says Friday sensibly.

Nobody lives on the island. So it was perfectly all right for us to scoot around in our birthday suits. And did we ever have fun!

"Phew!" says Pickles. "What's that queer smell?"

"It's the old slaughterhouse," says Slats. "See?" he pointed ahead. "There it is."

"And do they still use it?"

"No. It's been closed for years. But I know how to get in. Come on."

Friday, though, wasn't half as interested in the smelly old building as he was in the whitened bones that surrounded it.

"Look!" he cried. "Here's a leg bone. An old whopper, huh? I bet you it came out of a bull?"

"And look at this peachy skull," says Slats, trying to poke his head into the bony hunk.

"It's a shame," says Friday, giving the pile of bones a regretful look, "to let such swell bones as these go to waste."

We had planned to initiate Pickles, who was kind of smart because he came from the city, into our secret lodge. And wanting this initiation to be as impressive as possible we then decided (when he was out of hearing) to pick out the best of the bones as added decorations for our lodge room in Friday's barn. We're going to experiment with a couple of skulls, too, to see if we can hollow them out for headpieces. I hope so. Boy, I can imagine how the candidate's knees will wabble when he gets a peek at our reassembled bone yard. A dozen of us "bog-jumpers" (which is what he called us) are no match for him, huh? Well, he'll find out.

As I say, we had overheard some whispered talk among the girls in the intermediate class about a proposed "treasure hunt," never dreaming, of course, that they'd be dumb enough to pull off the "treasure hunt" on Boney Island. Yet that's exactly what they *did* do. And when we saw them coming (four boatloads, mind you!) I never was so scared and panicky in all my life.

Nor could we get away. For once they landed on the island they scattered every which way, giggling and cackling like a lot of silly geese. We finally wound up in the old slaughterhouse, where we hid, shivering, in five old tar barrels.

"Boy," says Slats, talking to me through the bunghole of his barrel, "this is awful."

"Keep still," says I, through the bunghole of my own barrel.

"There's a nail in my barrel," Tail Light piped up.

"Only one?" says Friday. "I bet if you'll count again you'll find ten.'"

"No," says Tail Light. "There's only one."

"I've got ten in my barrel," says Friday.

"Hoop nails?" says Tail Light.

"No; toenails."

"For the love of mud!" says Slats, who, of course, was scared stiff that we'd be overheard. "Keep still!"

But Tail Light's brains are all in his feet.

"Ouch!" a gooey squawk percolated through the bunghole of the smaller one's barrel.

"Another hoop nail, I suppose," says Slats furiously.

"No; a sliver."

Friday gagged.

"If this is an old tar barrel," says he, "please deliver me from ever hiding in a sauerkraut barrel."

"The farmer had to mix his swill in something," says Slats.

"What farmer?" says Friday.

"The one who owns this island. He kept pigs here last year."

"Oh, oh!" says Friday. "Buy me a gas mask."

After which Tail Light again uncorked his bazzoo.

"We're just like the forty thieves," says he. "They hid in barrels, too. And a lady poured hot oil on them."

"Iso-vis," says Friday, "or Quaker State?"

Then did Tail Light ever let out a screech!

"A snake!" says he, rocking his barrel. "A snake!"

"Where?" says Friday.

"I'm sitting on it."

"Shake it," says Friday, "and see if it rattles."

"Oh! . . ."

"Another snake?" Friday inquired cheerfully.

"No; it's a toad."

After which the old slaughterhouse with its cobwebby beams and ripe perfumery was filled with deep silence, and nothing else but. For the giggling treasure hunters had appeared outside the door.

"Oh, look!" says the chief giggler. "Here's an old building. Let's explore it."

(! ! ! ! !)

"And see," says another giggler. "There's a row of old barrels. Maybe one of them contains the treasure. Let's look and see."

(! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! !)

"Oh, oh!" the chief giggler started playing a tune with her esophagus.

"What's the matter?" says giggler number two.

"I saw a spider. Let's not go in."

"Who's afraid of spiders," old busybody planted herself in the front ranks. "Come on, kids."

"Phew!" giggler number two was partially overcome. "What a nasty smell!"

"This must be the old slaughterhouse that we heard about."

"Of course."

"Come on, kids," says giggler number one. "Let's go back to the boats."

"One, two, three, four, five," contributed the walking arithmetic.

"Five what?" says giggler number one.

"Barrels," says the walking arithmetic.

"Probably some nasty old lard barrels," says giggler number one. "Come on, kids; let's beat it."

"I know a game that we can play," says old busybody.

"Tell us," says gigglers, five, six, seven and eight all in one hunk.

"Everybody get a bone," says old busybody. "That's it. Now, stand here in the doorway and see if you can throw your bone into the first barrel."

(Poor Friday!)

"Oh, goody, goody!" giggler number one's safety valve popped off. "Mine went in."

"And so did mine," says giggler number two.

"Now," says old busybody, "get some more bones and see if you can throw them into the second barrel."

(Poor me, this time!)

"What was that?" giggler number one suddenly pricked up her ears. "I thought I heard a groan."

(It was poor Friday in the first barrel!)

"Oh, oh!" squealed giggler number two. "Maybe it's a ghost. Let's run."

(Hip-hip-hurray!)

"As though there's such a thing as a real ghost!" says old busybody. "Don't be silly. Now, let's see how many of us can hit the target."

(The luck was all theirs!)

"Isn't this fun!" gurgled old busybody. "I could do it all day."

(Gr-r-r-r!)

"Now," says old busybody, "let's get some rocks and aim at the third barrel. No; don't pick up those little rocks. Get some nice big ones. Like mine—see? And put them in with a bang."

"Oh, oh!" giggler number one dished out another squeal. "What was that noise? Is sounded like a thump."

(It was poor Slats fainting in the third barrel!)

But why go on with it? Enough is to say that they kept us there for more than an hour. And if you could see us to-night you'd think we'd been bombarded with pop bottles. I have bumps all over my bean. And poor Slats almost lost an ear. I never dreamed that girls were such good pitchers. But we're going to get even with them. Gr-r-r-r! And that Betty Sharpe was one of the ringleaders, too.

Legging it for the ford, as soon as the "treas-

ure hunters" had vacated the island, we almost drowned Tail Light in our hurry to reach the main shore. Dressing, we lit out for home.

And now if Pickles goes fishing to-morrow, as usual, it's our plan to meet at the ford with our Comet Coasters and start hauling bones.

August 19. This morning when I was hippety-hopping down the street in front of Betty Sharpe's house I accidentally dropped a nickel through a crack in the wooden sidewalk. And, of course, as soon as she saw me fooling around out there she had to come out to see what was going on. Girls are that way.

"Goodness gracious!" says she, when she got a better look at me. "What happened to the top of your head?"

As though I'd tell her!

Then, when Slats and Tail Light meandered into sight with their Comet Coasters, to which sideboards had been bolted, we headed for the old Indian ford, where Friday was waiting for us with a rented boat.

"How many skulls are you going to take?" says Friday, when, after rowing to the island, we were messing the junk around.

"Oh, about twenty," says Slats, picking out the best ones.

Dumping our first load of bones on the main-

sand we loaded up our coasters, Friday in the meantime having returned to the island for a supply of big leg bones. These would look swell, we figured, when fixed up kind of crisscross under the skulls. Like the poison sign on carbolic-acid bottles. Later we hauled home a lot of cow teeth. By covering our truck with weeds nobody along the road got wise to the fact that we were hauling old bones. And now, having made at least twenty trips to the island, we have the finest collection of bones that you ever set eyes on.

August 20. Oh, baby! We're all set for the initiation. And does our lodge room ever look peachy! Bones to the right of us, as Tennyson says in poetry, and bones to the left of us. Having locked ourselves in the barn, the better for secrecy, we dropped our work when Mr. Fish hammered on the door, asking us what we were doing in there. We were fixing up our lodge room, we told him, for an important initiation. I think he wanted to come in and see for himself what we were doing. But when we told him that our work was kind of secret-like he went away and left us.

To make Pickles' initiation all the more impressive we have curtained off one corner of the lodge room, calling it the Grotto of Blood. Here we have a special assortment of old bones daubed

up beautifully with red paint. Pickles will shiver, all right, when we tell him to go in there and sit down. Then, when he does sit down, he'll get a rat-a-tat-tat on the top of his bean that he won't soon forget. For we have fixed up a trick seat. A shower of teeth! That's what it is, all right. For when the seat tips back the teeth come tumbling down in a mess. Pickles will think that the roof of the barn is caving in on him.

August 21. I have a lot of stuff to write down to-night. But whether or not I can write it all down in one big gob is another question. For if you must know the truth I've laughed till I'm weak. Don't imagine, either, that the laugh is on Pickles. I guess not! Friday's pa has a black eye and a sprained wrist. My pa has a cracked rib. And Slats' pa has a plaster cast on his nose. Nor could they say a single sharp word to us about their combined misfortunes. For they had no business hiding behind our Grotto of Blood curtain. They got just what they deserved, only, of course, I'm sorry about my pa's cracked rib.

He gave me a dollar not to tell my ma how the accident happened, kind of making out to her, sheepish-like, that he had been dragged around by a Ford. But little Tail Light let the cat out

of the bag, as usual. And then did my ma ever laugh when she got the truth of the matter over the telephone! Still, like me, she felt kind of sorry for my poor pa and did the best she could to fix him up. I heard them talking after they went to bed. I heard my pa groaning, too. And every time he groaned my ma kind of snickered, thinking, I guess, as a picture of the initiation ran through her head, that his agony was largely put on. For everybody knows that a cracked rib isn't much.

Putting a quick finish on my breakfast this morning I hurried down the street to Slats' house where I found Pickles exercising the family lawn mower.

"You better save your strength," says I.

"Meaning which?" says he, draping himself against a tree.

"You'll need it," says I, "before bedtime."

Told then that this was the day of his initiation he let on that he was surprised.

"I had forgotten all about it," says he, kind of unconcerned-like.

"We haven't," says Slats quickly.

"I suppose you've got everything all fixed up, huh?" says Pickles, still convinced, of course, that two small-town bog-jumpers like us were no match for a smart city geezer like him.

"Practically everything," says Slats. "Of

course," he added, "we have a few little details to attend to, such as sharpening the butcher knives and enlarging the blood bucket."

"Butcher knives!" says Pickles. "Haw! haw! haw! You make me laugh."

"Do the city boys ever have initiations?" says Slats.

"Sure thing," says Pickles importantly. "In fact, that's where the idea originated. So don't kid yourself into thinking," he added, patting himself on the chest, "that you guys can put over anything new on this bird."

Later we put the finishing touches on our bony headpieces, which look swell, but, bu-lieve me, they're blamed hard on the neck. For they weigh about twenty pounds apiece. In fooling around with his, to see if it would go on backward as well as frontward, Tail Light got his head stuck in it. And did he ever squawk when we sort of extracted him. But we're used to his squawks. And what if he did lose a little hair? Shucks! He's lucky that he didn't lose his whole scalp.

Well, when night came we opened our lodge, having earlier fed Dynamite (our goat) gumdrops flavored with cayenne pepper. We sprinkled pepper on his supper, too. And when he began to froth at the mouth, and roll his eyes,

we knew, all right, that he was in perfect trim for the initiation.

We usually keep him in a stall in the back part of the barn. But when he started chewing the nails out of the wood, so eager was he to do his part in the coming initiation, we took him outside and chained him in the alley, having first made sure that the Crooker gang (our enemies) was nowhere in sight. Had we looked behind the Grotto of Blood curtains we would have found three men, gotten together by Friday's pa, who figured, I guess, after secret inspection of our lodge room, that the initiation was going to be something unusual. But we never dreamed that our pas would pull a snoopy trick like that on us.

Well, we got into our headpieces, having enlarged the opening of Tail Light's to save the rest of his scalp, and I rapped for order.

"Chief of the Dungeon Guards," says I, addressing Friday, who had been given this special office.

"Yes, Most High and Noble Assassin," says Friday, getting to his feet and saluting.

"Is there blood on the threshold of our castle?" says I.

Friday looked down at a gob of red paint.

"There is, Most High and Noble Assassin," says he.

"Whose blood is it?" says I.

"The life blood of our last victim," says Friday.

"Victim?" says I.

"I mean candidate," Friday corrected himself.

Pickles was parked in one corner of the room awaiting his part in the ceremony.

"Haw! haw! haw!" says he fearlessly. "This is going to be a scream."

"What was that?" says I, sort of pricking up my ears.

"It was the candidate, Most High and Noble Asssasin," says Friday. "He was praying for his life."

"Praying!" says Pickles. "Haw! haw! haw!"

"Then we have a candidate for initiation?" says I.

"Yes, Most High and Noble Assassin," says Friday.

"Who is he?" says I.

"A young smart aleck from Milwaukee," says Friday.

"What's his name?" says I.

"Pickles," says Friday.

I then called on the Chief Butcher.

"Has the candidate been prepared for initiation?" says I.

"Yes, Most High and Noble Assassin," says Slats, saluting.

"Is he blindfolded?" says I.

"Yes, Most High and Noble Assassin," says Slats again.

"Has he a board in the seat of his pants?" says I.

"Yes, Most High and Noble Assassin."

"Then lead him to the altar in the center of the room," says I, "make him bend over with the seat of his pants facing the east and unchain the goat."

Pickles pricked up his ears.

"What's that?" says he. "You guys haven't got a real goat, have you?"

"Bring it in," says I, "and let the candidate smell it."

"This isn't fair," says Pickles, when Dynamite let out an eager blat.

"What isn't fair?" says I.

"To make me bend over," says Pickles, "and let the goat upset me."

"Don't kid yourself," says I. "This goat is no upsetter; he's a putter."

"Meaning which?" says Pickles.

"Well," says I, "when he hits 'em square he usually puts 'em through the side of the barn."

"Aw! . . ." says Pickles. "Have a heart."

Of course, we never intended to let Dynamite bunt him through the side of the barn. For that wouldn't be fair, with him blindfolded and every-

thing. We just talked that way to scare him. We did intend, though, to make him straddle the goat and circle the lodge room.

And now let me tell you how smart Dynamite is. For the instant he was brought into the lodge room he knew that there were eavesdroppers, or whatever you call it, behind the Grotto of Blood curtain. *Bing!* Tearing loose he gave one bound across the room. We saw him go through the curtain as though it was made of tissue paper. There was an awful racket behind the curtain. And when Friday's pa tumbled into sight, holding the seat of his pants, with a hunted look in his eyes and the goat tearing after him, I guess you can imagine how surprised we were. Gosh! Our eyes stuck out like peeled onions.

Having bunted Friday's pa out of the barn and halfway across the garden, Dynamite went back after my pa, who tumbled out of the Grotto of Blood screeching bloody murder. Then there was a fearful yell from behind the curtain as the decorations, teeth and all, came tumbling down on top of Slats' pa. Talk about *excitement!* Everybody got in everybody else's way. Our doctor book (which we swear on) was tramped on in the fracas. Then over went the altar. And every time Dynamite missed the target (which wasn't often!) and struck the barn wall, down came a shower of bones. But finally my pa and

Slats' pa made their escape, after which Dynamite staggered into a corner and coughed up three pants buttons and a suspender buckle. He was all tuckered out. So we couldn't have continued the initiation if we had wanted to.

The men dragged themselves into Friday's kitchen for repairs. And when we peeked through the window they pulled down the curtain. But we could hear them talking.

"Good grief!" says my pa. "We'll be the laughingstock of the town."

"And what will our wives say?" says Slats' pa.

"Mine will never hear about it," says my pa, "if I can prevent it."

But she did, as I have written down. So my pa might just as well have saved his dollar for all the good it did him to bribe me to keep quiet.

Usually when a mix-up like this occurs our pas scold us. But this is one time when the fault is theirs. Gee! Did my pa ever look funny when Dynamite bunted him over the altar! I'll never forget it as long as I live.

(Later.) Slats just called up to tell me that the doctors are hopeful that in time his pa's nose will grow back to place. I didn't particularly notice Mr. Beale's nose before the doctors put it in a cast. But Slats says it was turned completely upside-down. Which reminds me of a poem that I read the other day about a man who

had his nose cut off. He was a snuff hound. And to his great joy the doctors sewed the nose on upside-down, which made it easy for him to pack his nostrils full of snuff. The only drawback was that he had to stand on his head to sneeze.

Maybe you'd like to have me print my whole diary here, telling what led up to the initiation and what followed, including our exciting search for the Potter treasure. But I've taken more pages now than Mr. Edwards suggested. So I'll ring off.

As Jerry Todd says, I'll see you later in the third book of my series *Trigger Berg and the Sacred Pig.*

THE END

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